

**“These New Rights”:
Social Security in the Post-War Italian Debate**

Studies of the “Italian model of welfare state” have long highlighted the unique qualities and dysfunctions of the social protection system that took shape in Italy in the decades following World War II. Moreover, they have pointed out continuities with Fascism and the scant receptiveness, after the conflict, to a universalist perspective geared toward bringing all citizens, as such, under the new umbrella of social rights (Ferrara, 1983, Silei 2004, Inaudi 2010).

While the overall dynamics of the Italian social state have been outlined, we have yet to arrive at a clear picture of the theoretical perspectives from which leading figures of the time viewed the edifice of the welfare state then under construction. What was the substance of the debate on these issues just after the war, and who were the key participants in it? To what degree did they look at other systems around the world? And, too, how was the relationship between social insurance and assistance, and between social and fiscal policy, laid out at the time? The article that follows will try to begin reconstructing the vision of the social safety net that emerged in Italy immediately after the war, with particular attention to the political and institutional forces fueling that debate. Social insurance and social assistance will be considered together, despite the awareness that they are two vast subjects with different and often quite separate paths and histories. We will try to see to what degree and with what meaning their spokespeople employed terms such as social rights or social security, which with an acceleration brought about by the war, became a pivotal point of reference internationally, both conceptually and in the lexicon (Victor, 1998, Hayek, 2011). We will primarily focus on the first few years after the conflict. While it was in the 1950s, as clarified by the most recent reconstruction of the Italian model of welfare state, (Ferrera, Fargion, Jessoula, 2012) that the corporative/patronage-based dynamic emerged that would characterize the system in later decades, the theoretical groundwork and stances taken on these issues had already traced the path that would be followed.

1. In search of an Italian Beveridge

Even while the conflict was still underway, there was a widespread awareness among various political forces that the edifice of the welfare state inherited from Fascism was

inadequate and required a radical overhaul. The issue was brought to the government's attention as early as March 1944. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers, there was discussion of a document presented by the Liberal Party's Epicarmo Corbino, Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor. His report proposed the appointment of a Royal Commission made up of experts on social insurance and assistance, tasked with developing proposals that would take into account the experiments underway in these fields in other countries:

As a whole, the laws regarding *Social Insurance* require a rapid, comprehensive reform that takes into account not only the changed economic structure of the country, but the new currents of thought on social issues that are gaining ground in more economically developed nations. The current system of social insurance leads to inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income [...] It therefore seems that the time has come to take decisive action in this realm, replacing the costly and inadequate forms of social insurance we have at present with the payment by the state of disability and old-age pensions, and other forms of benefits *to all citizens* in a state of need, with resources primarily obtained *through the normal tax system*, supplemented if necessary by some special social insurance tax with a very wide base. (Ricci, 1994)

In short, these were ambitious objectives that echoed universalist principles similar to those embraced by Beveridge, since they envisioned a reform that would provide benefits "to all citizens" by relying primarily on "the normal tax system." But the Royal Commission, though appointed, never met, and the long wait for a comprehensive reform of the system began.

In January 1946, the foundation of a *Commissione per lo studio dei problemi del lavoro* (Commission for the Study of Labor Issues), operating under the wing of the newly established Ministry of the Constituent Assembly, marked the first institutional discussion of the social safety net and its possible reform.¹ In the final report that the commission presented in June of the following year, one could however already note a shift in how the range of beneficiaries was conceived: no longer citizens in general, but workers. The problem of work, with a consequent focus on the citizen-worker, thus began to take center stage, parallel to the prime importance that the pressing issue of employment was increasingly assuming within the political and economic agenda. An initial consequence of this focus on workers could be seen in the attitude to be taken, in the Commission's view, toward all "members of the family unit who do not receive an income from work," i.e., "the elderly, children, students, housewives," who were to have "social insurance coverage" only indirectly through their connection to the worker, usually a man, thus perpetuating the male breadwinner model that had already been established and

¹ Known as the *Commissione Pesenti*, after its Communist chair Antonio Pesenti, the commission divided its tasks among four subcommittees. The third, charged with examining *Protezione sociale, previdenza e assistenza*, was chaired by the Socialist Antonio Mori, an occupational physician.

become entrenched during the Fascist era. While the term social security appeared nowhere in the report, one could also sense a certain semantic overlap between the terms assistance and insurance, often used as synonyms. The only element specifically tied to the term assistance was a gendered one; in the few pages specifically devoted to social assistance, one read that “within the larger framework of assistance to workers, the problem of assistance to working mothers stands out for its unique characteristics.”²

Despite these significant holdovers and continuities from the recent past, the Commission expressed its hope for a reform that would extend the social safety net to categories of workers who had none, and also for greater state involvement in funding social insurance, through an extremely vague invitation to introduce “appropriate taxes” targeting “the sectors of society that do not directly contribute to production.” In emphasizing that “there are many well-grounded criticisms of the current social insurance system,”³ the commission nevertheless emphasized the chaotic way in which the first democratic administrations were approaching these issues, noting that “many measures adopted to deal with emergency situations betrayed haste and smacked of improvisation.”⁴

In that period, similar observations also began to appear in the periodicals put out by the leading social security agencies. These were articles by academics, civil servants or experts from the social security sector, and due to their often technical tone, would remain confined to specialized periodicals. Nevertheless, they are extremely interesting because they reveal the level of dialogue, of harmony and friction, between the political sphere and the perspective of technocrats and scholars. In identifying obstacles on the path to reforming the welfare state, the latter emphasized above all “the lack of touchstones, of specific guidelines that would serve as a basis for forming a theory, which is the indispensable foundation for a comprehensive reform; and this is due to the intrinsic difficulty of the subject, as well as the reluctance to leave behind old conceptual frameworks that played such a major role in the historical development of individual institutions.” (Santoro, Nervi, Savoini, 1946) From their perspective, radical measures were called for: “Social insurance must be completely restructured in a unified and streamlined way. The current legislation in this field has become a conundrum, its technical dynamics a maze, its formulas have the complexity of algebra and algorithms. There is no point in trying to mend and patch it up. The mending can’t hold, and the patches are worse than the holes”. (Santoro, Nervi, Savoini, 1946)

² Ministero per la Costituente. 1946. *Atti della Commissione per lo studio dei problemi del lavoro*, Roma: 122.

³ *Ivi*: 117

⁴ *Ibid.*

It was therefore a weakness, a lack of even theoretical proficiency, along with the resistance to change of people and institutions that had taken shape over the previous decades, that presented an initial obstacle to reform. Moreover, the regime's systematic concealment of unemployment and poverty, with the ideology and propaganda that underlay many of Fascism's social initiatives, especially assistance to mothers and children, certainly had not fostered a tradition of scholarship (or scholars) dealing with social issues, let alone free debate. Just after the war, there was therefore a serious deficit of expertise on these issues that played no minor role. As was rightly noted years later, after 1945 "they searched, in vain, for an Italian Beveridge." (CNEL, 1963)

Nevertheless, while aware of the limitations and shortcomings with which the first postwar administrations were tackling the problem of reforming the welfare state, scholars and actuaries did not embrace the idea of extending a universalist social safety net to all citizens: "An extremist approach aimed at making all citizens take part in an obligatory social insurance system does not seem necessary to us, or even useful in practical terms. Those who are wealthy and can rely on a high income have ways to deal with any event and risk, and can protect themselves through discretionary insurance". (Santoro, Nervi, Savoini 1946)

These words, written in the spring of 1946 for the magazine of the *Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale* by Giuseppe Nervi (an actuary and member of the *Commissione per lo studio dei problemi del lavoro* mentioned earlier) reiterated that work marked out the field and confines of social insurance, and that a universalist approach to the social safety net was shunned by the majority of those dealing with such issues at the time. Moreover, as evidenced by an investigation published in the magazine of the *Istituto Nazionale di Assicurazione contro le Malattie* in late 1944 (Cabibbo, 1944), none of the leading political forces had concretely considered importing the Beveridge plan: the Republicans hoped for a return to nineteenth-century conceptions of mutual aid, the Liberals asked for the elimination of certain social insurance schemes (tied to parenthood and marriage status) that stemmed from the ideologies and demographic policy of Fascism. The Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists did not show radical differences of perspective in their positions, except for the left-wing formations demanding that the social insurance agencies be fully controlled by workers and that unions play a decisive role. Only the tiny Italian Democratic Party spoke of the need to extend social safeguards "to the entire population." The author of the investigation could therefore conclude that "no one wants to do away completely with the existing regulatory framework. No one is trying to copy the Beveridge plan [...] The latter, moreover, is extremely conservative and liberalist: it envisions the same contributions and benefits for the baronet as for his valet." (Cabibbo, 1944). The author seemed not to grasp that if baronet and valet shared the same benefits and contributions, it because the plan would largely be funded by the general tax

system, which therefore served as a tool for redistributing national wealth.

Precisely because it was seen as a “conservative and liberalist” plan, there was very little interest in the Beveridge Report within Communist circles, where on the whole, the theme of social security and its reform was given very short shrift in the first years after the war. For instance, there were only scattered articles in *L’Unità*, aimed at calling urgent attention to the widespread poverty of the population, but not at proposing or discussing a detailed and targeted strategy of intervention. From 1944 to 1949, no articles on these issues appeared in *Rinascita*, while in 1950, there was a highly negative assessment of the Beveridge Plan (but also the Monnet Plan), considered to be examples of “capitalist planning,” by Renato Mieli, editor-in-chief at the Milan office of *L’Unità*. (Mieli, 1950) Moreover, it was immediately clear that the party had delegated these problems to the union, which in turn singled out its social services agency, the Istituto Nazionale Confederale di Assistenza (INCA),⁵ as the tool for dealing in-depth with the concrete insurance and assistance problems of its members.

Some figures in the Socialist sphere instead showed greater receptiveness to the British model and towards the principles of universalism in general. Here again, there were only scattered articles that reflected the rifts between the two sides of the party on this as on other issues, which would later lead to its division in the winter of 1947. Giuseppe Penso, in the summer of 1945, wrote about a “social service” that would handle insurance, assistance, labor, healthcare, children and adolescents in a coordinated fashion, and even called for forms of protection “for the entire population, if possible”. (Penso, 1945) And the elderly union reformer Gian Battista Maglione, in the pages of *Critica Sociale*, suggested a system of social protection for all citizens, “as men, and not because they belong to any specific category.” Maglione was also the only one, in this era, to demand “entitlement to healthcare for all citizens.” Citing “the well-known Beveridge Plan,” he emphasized that in Italy, the struggle for freedom from want was not carried out with the necessary “radical approach, even by the social and political organizations that identify with the general interests of workers.” “Should one conclude,” he added, “that the Socialists failed to grasp the problem?” In March 1946, an official party document devoted to the question, *Programma per una riforma delle istituzioni previdenziali* (Program for a Reform of Social Insurance Institutions),⁶ focused its analysis instead only on the emerging strategies of the “production process” and not “generic postulates of solidarity and welfare.” This implied a special focus on the social insurance system, considered the only tool that could guarantee workers the freedom from want so urgently desired. Moreover, the document left unresolved the problem of reorganizing the devastated social insurance agencies, and did not suggest any way of funding the proposals it contained, above all those aimed at

⁵ INCA was founded in February 1945 during the 1st National Congress of the CGIL.

⁶ Archivio Fondazione Turati, Fondo D’Aragona, b. 24, f. 1.

introducing a “social salary,” that is, “the portion of the surplus production [...] that would provide for the living expenses of the latent workforce, those temporarily excluded from work, and those definitively excluded.”

It was the part of the DC most receptive to new economic and social orientations (the group known as the “little professors”), who later became close to the Dossetti-led wing associated with *Cronache Sociali*, that initially showed a favorable interest in the British experiment. (Brutti 2005, Pavan 2015) The interclass perspective found in the Beveridge Report could not help but find a favorable audience, just as its emphasis on “voluntary action”, a complementary but decisive aspect of Beveridge’s vision, was in harmony with the principle of subsidiarity that was present in embryonic form from the very beginning of Catholic social thought. Interest in the question of social insurance had led the newly founded DC, as early as the second half of 1943, to set up a commission to study the issue, culminating in the publication of two pamphlets: *Lineamenti di un piano organico di riordinamento della nostra previdenza sociale* (Outline of a General Plan for Restructuring Our Social Insurance System), published as early as 1943, and *Prime valutazione sul costo di un piano Beveridge per l’Italia* (Initial Estimate of the Cost of a Beveridge Plan for Italy), which appeared in 1945. Though they always referred solely to workers as the beneficiaries of the reforms, and never explicitly mentioned the category of social security, or of social rights, these documents acknowledged that the function of social insurance should go well beyond mutualistic aspects, serving the general function of redistributing the nation’s wealth in a more equal way. Social insurance strategies should therefore be one aspect of a more comprehensive new social policy. Looking at the British example, but also making reference to Sweden and New Zealand, they highlighted the need to connect reform programs to the “tool of taxation,” without which insurance contributions alone would never be capable of funding the system. (Vannutelli, 1943; Coppini, 1945) Nevertheless, in the years immediately following, the DC would redefine its stance on these issues, moving ever further away from Beveridge’s universalist principles toward an increased focus on work, and on social insurance, as the sole hub around which all reflections on the social safety net would revolve. In 1949, at the thirteenth “Social Week” of the Italian Catholics, entirely dedicated to the theme of social security, the overall tone of the speakers could be aptly summed up by this passage: “It seems that a general system of social insurance, that is, one aimed all citizens, is best suited to a society that has accepted the principles of the collectivist economy, rather than a society that refuses to accept such principles.”⁷ (ICAS, 1949) Then Fanfani paraphrased the words with which Monsignor Siri had opened the proceedings:

⁷ The so-called Code of Camaldoli, a sort of planning manifesto drawn up in the summer of 1943, in which a segment of the Italian Catholic world traced an outline for the country’s future social and economic structure, contained no references to social security or social rights, but only to social insurance, described strictly in such terms.

“There is no social security system more effective than work.”

If, as Luigi Einaudi wrote in 1949, the Beveridge Plan “assumed the status of a legend, one of those legends that suddenly appeal to the emotions, the ideals of a people,” (Einaudi, 1949) one could say that this legend was only superficially received and publicized in Italy, to the degree that—and this is significant—no translation of the Beveridge Report was even published in Italian,⁸ unlike the other two volumes of Beveridge’s trilogy, (Beveridge, 1948, Beveridge, 1954),⁹ whose themes—the need for full employment and to preserve spaces of individual action in pursuing social security—were more in harmony with the ideas and objectives of the leading political cultures.

2. “These new rights”

As we know, the term “social rights” does not appear in the text of the Italian constitution, although there is a (primarily legal) literature that tries to highlight how a sensitivity to social themes emerges from an overall reading of various articles within it. (Olivella, 1988, Crisafulli, Paladin, 1990) Nevertheless, the framing given to article 38, the article that expresses the vision and meaning then attributed to social insurance and assistance, shows how discussion of these topics during the constituent period came to reflect an outlook in which social rights directly descended from work, introducing a clear distinction between the social insurance and assistance safeguards due to working citizens and those due to non-working citizens. There was a widespread awareness that the new category of social rights represented something more and different from the traditional rights to freedom, and that they were rights which implied an active role of the state to secure them. But on the rare occasions that social rights were brought up in the constitutional debate, their scope and boundaries mirrored the sphere of work. And so Togliatti, in mentioning “these new rights,” considered them to be an attribute, a synonym, of worker’s rights: “This is the case when affirming the rights of labor, the so-called social rights.”¹⁰ And Lelio Basso, too, implicitly suggested that

⁸ Only the official summary of the Report, which the British government had translated and circulated at the end of 1943, was published in Italian.

⁹ The translation rights for the Beveridge Report were actually purchased by Adriano Olivetti’s Nuove Edizioni di Ivrea, forerunner of the later Edizioni di Comunità.

¹⁰ Atti Parlamentari (AP) Assemblea Costituente (AC), seduta 11 marzo 1947:1992. For Togliatti’s positions, see also AC, 1st Subcommission, session 9 ottobre 1946: 218. This is how Luigi Longo referred to social rights, without explicitly using the term, in an article that appeared in *L’Unità* on May 26, 1946 titled *Il nostro programma sociale per la Costituente: la libertà dal bisogno!*: “At the Constituent Assembly, the Communist Party will ask that along with political and civil rights, the new constitution declare and sanction the new rights of those who work with their hands or minds: [...] the right to work, to rest, to education, to social insurance against illness, unemployment, injury and old age.”

democracy, the right to work, and social security were all equivalent. “Until work is guaranteed to all,” he stated, “freedom will not be guaranteed to all; until there is social security, there will be no true political democracy.”¹¹ Only Massimo Severo Giannini, as part of a reflection that nevertheless was not part of discussions on the formulation of article 38, spoke of the subjective and hence universal nature of social rights. “These ‘other’ rights,” wrote the jurist, were part of the “natural, inalienable heritage of each individual,”¹² in keeping with what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would soon affirm. (D’Alessio 1979)

In the rewritings that the text of the future article 38 underwent between the first and third subcommission, the Commission of 75 and the plenary session, (Paniga 2015) the dichotomy was preserved between assistance to the citizen and insurance for the worker, which were seen as separate universes, without this leading to any apparent conflict between the leading political forces. And so the final formulation of the article, as it was approved on May 10, 1947, allowed a crystallization of the status quo as it had emerged from the Fascist period, preserving the mutualistic insurance system as the supporting structure of the social safety net and giving public assistance only a secondary and purely residual role. This was a distinction that could also be noted in the language adopted, where assistance, for all citizens, was aimed at providing “means of support,” mere subsistence, while insurance was meant to provide workers with “means suited to their needs,” following what seemed to be a clear hierarchy. When the text was being discussed in the assembly, the Republican Party’s Ludovico Camagni spoke of a “crystallization of the current situation,”¹³ while Mario Merighi, a member of Saragat’s PSLI, was the only one to forcefully argue the need for coordination between the many social insurance and assistance agencies.¹⁴ But these few voices were in the minority.

It is interesting to point out that in the years immediately following, the “corroborative” quality of article 38 was noted more than once, especially when proposals regarding social insurance or assistance were presented to the administration, usually by representatives of the Communist Party. In July 1952 a bill sponsored by Teresa Noce and Oreste Lizzardi was aimed at providing more adequate protection to all the seasonal workers who had lived in a state of permanent underemployment that did not allow them, in old age, to rely on sufficient pensions. In presenting the plan, its supporters referred to article 38 of the Constitution and asked for exceptions and reductions in how contributions were tallied, so that even occasional workers could draw a pension. The administration opposed this measure. A telling motivation was given

¹¹ AP, AC, session 6 marzo 1947: 1824.

¹² Giannini made this reflection in the Ministry for the Constituent Assembly’s Commission for Studies on the Restructuring of the State.

¹³ AC, AP, session 10 maggio 1947: 3825.

¹⁴ AC, AP, session 7 maggio 1947:3698. On the right to health, also considered a social right, see Merighi’s speech in AC, AP, 24 aprile 1947:3301.

by the Minister of Labor, Leopoldo Rubinacci, for his rejection of the bill, grounded precisely in the division between assistance and insurance inscribed in article 38:

Examining the proposed measure, one can clearly see that its chief aim is to provide assistance [...] The law does not fit harmoniously into the existing framework, however, since it distorts the underlying principles aimed at providing social insurance for the worker, introducing concepts in a completely different vein [...] that is, of social assistance for the citizen.¹⁵

Similar reactions were prompted by the presentation, in June 1954, of a bill titled *Assegno vitalizio ai vecchi lavoratori* (Annuity for Elderly Workers), signed by the MPs Di Vittorio, Santi, Lizzardi, Novella, and Foa.¹⁶ In its basic tenets, the proposal was a forerunner to the social pension that would be introduced in the second half of the 1960s. According to its proponents, the measure sprang from the observation that many elderly people, though they had worked all their lives, had no right to any form of social insurance and required aid in terms of social assistance:

This very serious phenomenon has been brought about in our country due to the enormous tax evasion that took place under the Fascist regime, in the payment of insurance contributions by employers; this evasion was massive and widespread, especially in agriculture and in the South and islands (in Sardinia—for an entire decade—not a single contribution was paid for agricultural laborers!)

Their entreaty was tied above all to “the constitutionally affirmed duty (article 38) whose fulfillment can no longer be postponed.” But once again, the division between assistance and insurance established by article 38 allowed the administration to reject the proposal, both from a rhetorical and a political standpoint. With an outlook modeled on the Liberal principles of nineteenth-century *carità legale*, the Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba opined that elderly indigent workers should turn to the municipal assistance agencies, “to keep this aid within the usual realm of ordinary relief.” In the view of Treasury Minister Silvio Gava, accepting the bill would have radically altered the substance and nature of social policy, guiding it towards a system of “social security,” and for this reason it had to be rejected:

The proposal in question [...] is aimed at transforming the current system of social insurance into a system of social protection or social security. More specifically, while the current social insurance system ensures the protection of various categories of workers, a social security system is aimed at protecting

¹⁵ ACS, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale (MLPS), Gabinetto, b. 242, f. 16/45.

¹⁶ AP, Legislatura II, Documenti, Disegni di legge e relazioni, Camera dei deputati, session 3 giugno 1954.

citizens across the board, providing the necessary services in all circumstances [...] Therefore, the element of “work” that underpins the current system would be replaced by the element of “need”.¹⁷

It was also during parliamentary discussions, above all regarding approval of the budget for the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance, that the assistance/insurance dualism re-emerged. In 1950, the Socialist senator Mario Berlinguer once again pointed out the need to stop thinking of social assistance and insurance separately: “We would also like the administration to realize, at long last, that the problems of assistance and of insurance are perfectly inseparable.”¹⁸ The social insurance system was also in a disastrous state, a fact everyone knew and lamented, which made the question of assistance particularly urgent; more than ever, they were two sides of the same coin, since a fragmented, chaotic, and inadequate insurance structure put workers, former workers and the unemployed in a situation where they often had to rely on the few social assistance services that existed—a worker who retired, for instance, automatically fell out of the healthcare system. Nevertheless, Mario Berlinguer’s voice was an isolated one, even within the parties on the left, which in those years seemed to have a lingering disinterest in the problem of social assistance, considered “in some sense a task of the women’s movements within the parties [...] and was also the preferred realm of Catholic initiative.” (Terranova, 1975) Giovanni Berlinguer—Mario’s son, a physician and Communist MP—would criticize his own party years later for having seen “the frontier of assistance” as “too far back from the front lines to be worth devoting a revolutionary party’s forces to it.” (Terranova, 1975, Cammarano, 1982) Even a law strongly desired by the left, the one that established corporate daycare centers in 1950,¹⁹ which constituted the most quantitatively significant social service in existence at the time, while undoubtedly a step forward for working women, at the same time moved in the direction of a shifting responsibility for social services from the state to the private business owner, and thus marked a return to the world of work and more specifically to the factory.

3. The paradigm of missed opportunities: the D’Aragona Commission

In July 1947, Fanfani, then Minister of Labor, appointed a commission to study and draft an overall plan for reforming the social safety net. This was the *Commissione per la Riforma della Previdenza Sociale* (Commission for Social Insurance Reform), more commonly known

¹⁷ ACS, MLPS, Gabinetto, b. 242, f. 16/23

¹⁸ AP, Senato, Discussioni, session 24 marzo 1950:14826.

¹⁹ Law 860 of August 26, 1950, *Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri*. This law was only minimally observed, as pointed out years later by the *Relazione di presentazione della proposta di legge “Istituzione del servizio nazionale dei nidi-asilo per la vigilanza diurna e la prevenzione igienico-sanitaria dei bambini fino a 3 anni”*, signed by the female Communist MPs Molinari, Cinciari Rodano and others; see AP, III Legislatura, Camera dei Deputati, Documento 3628, 8 febbraio 1962.

as the D'Aragona Commission, after the elderly Socialist labor leader who was appointed to head it. (Mattera, 2012) Limited in its operation by being granted only a few months to do its work, and by the lack of reliable financial data, which made it impossible to estimate the cost of the proposed reform, the commission eventually distilled its task into 88 motions that if put into practice—as many have written—would have marked a turning point in the country's approach to social insurance. In the historiography of the welfare state, the chapter of the D'Aragona Commission has indeed been described at times as a crossroads, a path that if taken, would have led the country towards a different and more modern system of social safeguards. However, in keeping with the constitutional dictates of article 38, and with a certain vision of social security that was shared across party lines, the guidelines inspiring the reform that the commission proposed outlined a welfare state that yet again, was fueled by and limited to workers:

Social insurance *must not be extended to all citizens* [...] And this is not only because our national economy would not allow such a great financial burden, but also because it would go beyond the aims of social protection that the reform must strive for.²⁰

The commission's final report showed a certain vagueness and lack of conceptual clarity in its use of terms such as social protection, insurance, security, and assistance, which were employed as synonyms, without any precise awareness of the differences between them: "No one is capable of specifying where social insurance ends and social assistance begins, and it is difficult to establish a sufficiently clear concept."²¹ According to the commission, the repeatedly cited objective of freedom from want, the only true slogan that seems at that point to pervade all the rhetoric regarding social issues, would be achieved "through social insurance," which is definitely a reductive and circumscribed vision of the tools and objectives of social security.²² These terminological ambiguities are not surprising. Even the International Labour Organization stated in 1949 that "there does not yet exist an internationally accepted definition of social security," (ILO, 1949) because the concept varied drastically depending on the national context; specific (narrower) definitions or (broader) philosophical approaches coexisted in the international debate, corresponding to sociopolitical visions and strategies that were very different from country to country. (Lengwiler, 2015)

What later characterized the forms of indirect social insurance—already stated by the *Commissione per lo studio dei problemi del Lavoro* and mentioned earlier—were legally recognized ties of kinship. The discussion of which family ties should be taken into

²⁰ Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza sociale, *Relazione della commissione per la riforma della previdenza sociale*. 1949. Roma: 6.

²¹ Ivi:120.

²² *Relazione della commissione per la riforma della previdenza sociale*: 5.

consideration led the commission to declare that these rights were held only by members of the legitimate family. With regard to the familist, patriarchal framing of the future social protection system, significant words were uttered by the commission chair himself, a long-time Socialist labor leader, who expressed the hope that women would return to the domestic sphere, once social security systems were in place: “We hope that the financial situation of Italian workers will someday, as soon as possible, be such as to allow every wife to take on only the duties of her household, and above all, the very delicate tasks of motherhood.”²³ The crucial problem of funding social security was handled in a summary fashion, not without a degree of vagueness. While state contribution was considered indispensable, this was due above all to the need not to additionally burden industry by imposing harsher contributions, which would risk “disturbing the economic structure of the country.” The report therefore called for using “an appropriately wielded tax mechanism,” but in what terms and with what methods was left unspecified. And so, even with the D'Aragona Commission, there continued to be a basic silence about the connections between social security, its funding, and the overhaul of the country's outdated tax structure. This was a subject that despite its clearly central importance, was in constantly left on the sidelines of discussion in those years, by all political forces.

The proposed reforms outlined by the D'Aragona Commission, made public at the beginning of April 1948, were not laid aside; Fanfani worked to draft a substantial bill titled *Progetto di riforma della Previdenza Sociale* (Plan for Social Insurance Reform) that reflected the overall conclusions of the commission and was presented to the Council of Ministers in December of 1949. Ninety percent of funding for the plan derived from worker and employer contributions; the remaining ten percent came from the state budget, without the minister in any way specifying what the sources of these funds would be. The eagerly anticipated bill, brought up more than once during the parliamentary sessions of 1949-1950, nevertheless ran aground on the shoals of rifts and crises within the administration and the Christian Democratic Party itself, which led Fanfani to resign in January 1950 (Pavan, 2015). While the bill was definitively shelved, many of the measures in it were introduced “in bits and snatches” (Cherubini, 1977) over the 1950s, according to the irrational, erratic incremental dynamic of introducing provisions that seemed to be the only real leitmotif of welfare policies.

In this sense, tracing an initial overview in 1951 of what had been achieved by the administrations of the postwar period, the magazine *Previdenza Sociale* published an article by the Director-General of INPS, a rather merciless assessment that highlighted how the lack of any radical reform had not only led to a preservation of the status quo, but had even accentuated the limitations and flaws of the system inherited from Fascism, making any possible future change of course ever “more arduous”: “Six years of intense legislation show adjustments

²³ *Relazione della commissione per la riforma della previdenza sociale*: 134.

conceived as temporary remedies, but which, having deeply affected the financial or operating structure of some forms of social insurance, have over time primarily exacerbated their initial flaws, rendering more arduous the task of those who will have to recalibrate the cumbersome and complex mechanism currently in existence.” (Palma, 1951)

3. Institutional continuity

Redesigning the welfare state after the war also entailed rethinking its central and local institutions: both the ministerial agencies and the major social security authorities, the youngest of which, the Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro le Malattie (INAM) had only been founded in January 1943. It was a widespread opinion that the social insurance entities inherited from Fascism required in-depth reform, were inefficient and had to be reconceived in the direction of creating a single, more streamlined agency. “The social institutions developed by Fascism [...] Have themselves absorbed all the shortcomings of the Fascist state: bloated, bureaucratic and centralizing” (Zuccarini, 1945); in the social security agencies, “care has been taken to set up hierarchies without any concern for their quality”; this was a cumbersome bureaucracy that even after the war, was doing “everything it could to preserve its own cozy, well-paid little position.” (Penati, 1946) But a reform of the agencies could only follow a complete reform of the very structure of the social safety net, which struggled to find room on the agenda. A remarkable degree of institutional “path dependence” therefore characterized the life of the major agencies, whose technocracies and, more generally, whose history after 1945 remain completely unexplored at present. In the early 1950s, the youngest of these institutions, INAM, was characterized by a total imbalance between collected contributions and operating expenses (the latter stood at eighteen percent in 1948, due in part to the over ten thousand civil servants employed there), and had already run up a deficit of twenty billion lire, eight of them resulting from massive evasion by employers; seven years after its establishment, it was also still waiting for regulations to govern its activities and give it the concrete tools to do its job and levy fines.²⁴ Institutional fragmentation generated a muddled, labyrinthine mosaic in which the same service was often managed by multiple agencies, who were thus assigned the same task—this was true, for instance, of disability pensions, which were paid at the same time by INPS, INAM, INAIL, INA, and by an unspecified series of corporate mutual funds, as well as by state bodies which were divided in turn between those for state or public employees.

Attention was shifted from the social insurance agencies to ministry structures by the Social Democrat Ezio Vigorelli, who in his 1948 pamphlet *L'offensiva contro la miseria* (The

²⁴ AP, Senato, *Stato di previsione della spesa del Ministero del lavoro e della previdenza sociale luglio 1950–giugno 1951*, 24 marzo 1950:14842.

Attack on Poverty) criticized the chaos among the bodies entrusted with managing social insurance and assistance. The future Minister of Labor emphasized that institutional fragmentation generated confusion and overlapping jurisdictions, as well as an enormous waste of resources. The obvious scattering of responsibility among different institutional subjects led to the uncoordinated execution of tasks by about ten ministries and commissariats: the Ministry of the Interior managed funding for a myriad of aid and charity institutions, as well as the municipal relief bodies and the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia; the same office had also inherited most of the functions of the former Ministry of Post-War Assistance which was dissolved in 1947 and became a general office of the Ministry of the Interior, only to be subsequently merged with the newly founded General Office of Public Assistance. In the late 1940s, the Ministry of the Interior therefore firmly reinstated its traditional control over the entire strategic sector of social assistance. But matters of social insurance and assistance were also dealt with by the Ministries of Agriculture, of Defense, of Education, of Justice, of Italian Africa, by the High Commissions on Food and on Health and Hygiene, by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and, of course, by the Ministry of Labor and of Social Insurance, refounded in July 1946.

Nevertheless, the need for a new, different structure for the institutions entrusted with the social safety net did not seem to be high on the political agenda in the period just after the war. Only the Socialists, in the end of 1945, envisioned the foundation of a Secretariat for Social Assistance, to be established within the future Ministry of Labor, which when reinstated, should take on the name of Ministry of Labor and Social Assistance (Basso, 1945). In Parliament, the first to ask for the creation of a “Ministry of Social Security, following the example of the most civilized and advanced countries in Europe: that is to say, a ministry that will collect, concentrate, and unify all services related to welfare, hygiene, health and social insurance,” was the Social Democrat Umberto Zanfagnini, in the fall of 1948.²⁵ Parallel to this, the same proposal was presented to the administration by his fellow Social Democrat Ezio Vigorelli, in a long document²⁶ titled *Note per un piano di sicurezza sociale* (Notes for a Social Security Plan) that was circulated among the ministries; in it, highlighting redundant services, expenses and responsibilities, Vigorelli again called for a department to be set up that would centralize the various powers, based on the models of France, Sweden, New Zealand and Great Britain. In his memorandum, Vigorelli quoted word for word the US recommendations in this regard from the summer of 1947, as part of the Aid from the United States of America (AUSA) program signed by the De Gasperi administration:

²⁵ Atti Parlamentari, I Legislatura, Discussione, Camera dei deputati, session 23 ottobre 1948: 3942.

²⁶ ACS, MLPS, Gabinetto, b. 22, f. 129.

The economic cooperation law contains no specific measures regarding the funding of social assistance activities [...] Nevertheless, the recovery of a nation presupposes the recovery of its citizens as well as the recovery of its industry and agriculture [...] A unified, coordinated state program [...] would be a step forward with regard to the [Italian] government's often repeated declarations about social reform.²⁷

The reactions to the proposal were all negative, however. The High Commissioner on Health and Hygiene,²⁸ physician and Christian Democrat Mario Cortellessa, specifically praised the Ministry of the Interior, deeming it “unquestionably the body best suited to providing” social assistance services—which he tellingly referred to using the term “charity”—due in part to the historical value of tradition and continuity:

Motives of a historical nature prompt me to indulge in this statement, since the Ministry of the Interior, from Unification to the present, has shown enlightened wisdom in successfully preserving and managing the very significant resources of public charity.²⁹

Fanfani, who was Minister of Labor at the time, while acknowledging that Vigorelli's request was a grounded one, feared that an increase in state involvement would eat into the traditional, and traditionally religious, spaces of private aid, which moreover were sanctioned by article 38: “one should not forget that this could have a negative effect, hindering and drying up the funds provided by private institutions.” Lodovico Montini also asserted that the Administration for International Aid,³⁰ which he headed, should be seen as the “sole responsible agency [...] suited to properly performing these tasks through its central and peripheral organs.”³¹ The deeply rooted interests of the Catholic world, broad sectors of which were caught up at the time in Pacelli's mission to re-Christianize society, as well as the lack of interest in these subjects that characterized the Communist Party of the era, did not make the time ripe for a department of social security. Significantly, the Ministry of Post-War Assistance, the only brief institutional experiment that tried, amid difficulties of all kinds, to redefine citizens' rights, social rights and social assistance, was dissolved, as we have mentioned, as early as February 1947.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The High Commission for Health and Hygiene was established in July of 1945; answering to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, it remained in operation until 1958, when the Ministry of Health was founded.

²⁹ ACS, MLPS, Gabinetto, b. 22, f. 129.

³⁰ Set up in 1947, the *Amministrazione per gli Aiuti Internazionali* oversaw implementation of the agreement signed with the US government and management of the related fund. It was headed, up to its dissolution in 1962, by the Christian Democrat Lodovico Montini, brother of the future Pope Paul VI.

³¹ ACS, MLPS, Gabinetto, b. 22, f. 129

Amid semantic vacillations and ambiguities, the term “social security” was attributed a very specific meaning in post-war Italy that began and ended with the need to safeguard working citizens. There was a widespread, across-the-board conviction that guaranteeing employment would lead, almost automatically, to social security and to the oft-invoked freedom from want. This caused an almost exclusive focus on the social insurance aspects of the phenomenon, defined in strictly mutualistic terms. It was nevertheless impossible, at least in the period immediately after the war, to arrive at any true definition of social security, unlike other European contexts where there was a greater conceptual investigation of such issues. As early as 1948, for instance, Pierre Laroque, the French theorist of *sécurité sociale*, presented in the magazine of the International Labour Organization a broad, complex vision of what social security ought to be:

It is, first of all, an economic policy aimed at full employment. Secondly, it is a medical policy for the struggle against disease, including both preventive action and the best possible treatment; as a natural counterpart of this it is also a technical policy for the prevention of industrial accidents and occupational diseases. Social security, is, thirdly, a policy of income distribution aimed at modifying the results of the blind interplay of economic forces and at adapting the income of each individual and each family to that individual's or family's needs, having regard to all the circumstances which may affect such income in the future. (Laroque, 1948)

In retrospect, it may seem paradoxical that in an era when problems connected to massive unemployment were generating constant interest and alarm, an idea of social security was being constructed, both from a rhetorical and political standpoint, that saw work alone as its *raison d'être*. This was fueled by the laborist perspective that, albeit from different positions and with different aims, was shared by the Christian Democrats—or rather, the components of the party associated above all with the figure of Fanfani—and the Communist Party. And so, in the realm of social protection as well, the parties arrived at an “extraordinary compromise” between their different views and interests. Not absent, but certainly in the minority, were voices connected to the Social Democratic spirit of the Socialist Party, which since 1945 had expressed a different outlook, more attentive to the various facets of a new concept of citizenship, which in the years immediately following would find its own touchstone in T. H. Marshall's definitions.

While there seemed to be no discussion of a possible connection between social security reform and tax reform among any of the political forces, aside from brief and rather generic references, there was also very little reflection on the macroeconomic role that the social security sector should and could play in the delicate period of reconstruction (Klausen, 1998). In this sense it is useful to underline that Italian economic planning just after the war was oblivious

to reflections, proposals and goals regarding the problems of the social safety net—there is a telling absence of such references in the so-called Saraceno Plan of 1947, but also a significant silence on these subjects in the Labor Plan presented by the CGIL in 1949. Italian economists in general, with rare exceptions, showed a basic lack of concern with the complex problems of social security. As highlighted in 1963 by a report of the National Council of Economics and Labor (CNEL, 1963) which presented a specific, critical examination of the country’s social insurance situation, there was very little “participation by economists, whereas in the English-language literature they had significantly contributed to exploring the problems of how social security contributions and services influence the formation and distribution of income, consumption, savings, and investments.”³²

On the front of social assistance, the Christian Democrats worked as one, managing to maintain almost exclusive control, even at the institutional level, over this strategic sector, towards which the Communist Party showed little interest at the time. In this sense, it was also the non-complementary, highly dichotomic structure given to the sectors of social assistance and insurance—a dichotomy inscribed in the Italian Constitution itself—that allowed and facilitated holdovers and continuities in the management of social protection. In the first decade after the war, the long-term conceptual, institutional and legal framework was never really called into question; talking about missed opportunities might therefore be misleading with regard to the decisions, or the lack thereof, that did not just unquestionably stem from the socio-economic context of the time, but also—or perhaps above all—from specific visions and influences within the political culture.

³² The economists who did address these subjects include Celestino Arena, Francesco Coppola D’Anna, Sergio Steve, Federico Caffè.