7 Social Welfare and Social Services in Italy Since 1950

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The different stages of development

This article presents a brief analysis of social policy in Italy since 1950, and deals in particular with policy concerning the social services. First of all, it is necessary to describe the different stages in the historical development of this social policy, of which four may be distinguished in post-war Italy. They begin with the establishment of the Italian Republic, under whose Constitution the model of the welfare state already existing in other Western countries was adopted.

From 1950 to the early 1960s (the residual model of the welfare state). Italian society during this period was built on the liberal model of the "open society" turned towards post-war reconstruction. State social security was organised on the basis of the social insurance system formerly elaborated by the fascist régime (1925-43). This inherited system was part of the machinery of a residual welfare state that was slowly moving towards an institutional model based on the new ideological principles outlined in the Constitution. Many of the issues discussed during this period were embodied in the law during the following stages.

From the early 1960s to 1970 (the ideological roots of the institutional model). This was a period of fertile transition. Laws were enacted to ensure some of the social rights prescribed by the Constitution (for instance, the Act on elementary education with the extension of compulsory schooling to the age of 14). On the other hand, a crucial debate among the political parties developed about the reorganisation of social security, social services, and social action in the field of labour. The main concern was the planning of social policy, at all levels of public administration, with the decentralisation of public assistance to local authorities (regions and communes).

From 1970 to 1975 (the bases of the institutional welfare state: the first regional legislature). This is the period of the actual decentralisation of welfare. Functions previously carried out by the central Government were trans-
ferred to the new regional governments (or "ordinary statute" regions), which were made autonomous in these matters through budgetary appropriations (Act No. 281/1970). This Act gave effect to the provisions of article 117 of the Constitution.

The reorganisation of social services was based essentially on the principle that the commune should be held responsible for the provision and administration of the great majority of social services. Responsibility for the planning and co-ordination of social measures in welfare sectors was conferred on the region, as the highest local authority.

From 1975 to 1980 (the realisation of the institutional model, with a trend towards a "total welfare state": the second regional legislature). This is the most effective stage of social reform. It begins with Act No. 385/1975 (entitled: "Principles for the organisation of the regions and of public administration"). A subsequent decree of the President of the Republic (No. 616/1977) laid down the procedure for giving effect to this Act.6

The most significant reform of the period was, without a doubt, that of the health-care system (Act No. 833/1978). This reform embraced the fundamental aims of universality and equality, preventive measures and wide participation in the provision of public health services.

In considering these four stages, I would outline a few basic trends that can be detected to some extent in other welfare systems, though there are also several differences.

— The growth of public action in comparison with that of private institutions (whether profit-making or non-profit-making). The Italian State, particularly since the turning-point of 1970, has been gradually breaking out of the former limited system of public assistance which operated purely on a social insurance basis and relied heavily on means tests and the principle of selectivity. The effort required to build up an institutional welfare model of social policy has been great but, in my opinion, the actual model it has led to can be considered a quasi-total welfare model, since it embodies the principle that all needs, whether manifest, potential, or of any other nature, must be met by statutory agencies. That is to say public institutions—the necessity to apply to private agencies no longer existing in principle at any rate. The trend in social policy is to make private agencies unnecessary or, at best, marginal to the system, though they can still be applied to in practice, and reality is thus very far from corresponding to the principle. The essential fact is that this principle was the focus of social legislation in the 1970s.

— Growth of expenditure on public services. It is obvious that the commitment to satisfy the basic needs of everybody, irrespective of the contribution that he or she makes to the production of goods and services, will cause social expenses to get out of hand.8 At the same time, the effort to create the welfare state requires an enormous expansion of the fiscal machinery which, in turn, means the increasing economic and social dependence of individuals, families, and social groups on the public administration.9