

A law made by Italian mothers for Italian mothers? Women politicians and the 1950 law on maternity rights

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The development of welfare policies aimed at mothers and children has been deeply influenced by women's agency. This article explores the role played by Italian women politicians in the passing of the 1950 law on maternity rights. It examines the campaigns conducted by both left-wing and Catholic women,¹ and discusses the arguments and strategies they used to ensure that this gendered issue was on the political agenda. Particular attention is given to the parliamentary history of this legislation. While the law was being debated antagonism between the parties was at its height, and competition between the opposing women's organisations was fierce. Despite this, at a parliamentary level cross-party collaboration between women politicians was possible on this specific issue and was a crucial factor in the law being passed.

Keywords: welfare state; cross-party collaboration; women politicians; gender; motherhood; maternity

Introduction

In 1950 the Italian Parliament passed the first legislation of the post-war period on maternity rights, normally referred to as *Legge 860* (Law 860).² In the following two decades women on the left frequently referred to it as the *Legge Noce* (Noce Law), after Teresa Noce, the Communist parliamentary deputy and prominent union leader who had been its principal left-wing advocate. More generally, in the 1950s and 1960s women on the left claimed exclusive responsibility for the law. In other words, Law 860 was portrayed as an important reform demanded by women on the left, particularly Teresa Noce, and achieved thanks to their efforts. This narrative intentionally ignored the involvement of Catholic women politicians, who did not exploit the passing of Law 860 for political purposes. This article explores the role played both by left-wing and by Catholic women in the legislative process. It analyses the contribution of the Christian Democrat (DC) deputy Maria Federici, alongside the Communist Teresa Noce, as a protagonist in this reform of Italy's welfare system.

Recent historiography has rightly identified women's cross-party collaboration as an important factor behind this piece of legislation. At the end of the 1940s there was arguably a general agreement on the necessity of reviewing maternity rights (Casalini 2008, 88–90) and women politicians were able to put aside other disagreements to ensure the passing of this law (Righi 1999, 72–74; Pojmann 2013, 59–60; Tambor 2014, 75–107). However, research has focused primarily on the role, views and achievements of Teresa Noce. By placing Catholic women politicians also centre stage, this article highlights the full extent of this cross-party consensus and its significance for the creation of the post-war welfare state.

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The question of women's agency in welfare state development has remained central to welfare research. Numerous studies have emphasised how women played a crucial role in its development both in Western European countries and in the United States. As individuals or through their organisations, they succeeded in shaping one particular area of state policy: programmes aimed at women and children (Bock and Thane 1991; Koven and Michel 1993). Studies specific to both Liberal and Fascist Italy confirm these findings. Annarita Buttafuoco (1991) has demonstrated how the law that established the National Maternity Fund in 1910 was passed due to pressure from women's groups and associations and their members' experiences of local maternity funds over the previous thirty years. For the later period, Maria Sophia Quine has shown that many women from the traditional elites ascended to positions of leadership within Fascist welfare institutions and could thus influence Fascist social policy: despite their exclusion from the electorate, women were successful in achieving change in an area traditionally linked to the female sphere (2002, 249–288).

This article examines the extent to which women politicians and activists continued to shape Italy's social policy after they entered formal political life in 1946, an issue that to date has remained under-investigated.³ By exploring the agency of women politicians in the passing of Law 860, the article contributes to the history of what Molly Tambor calls 'the lost wave' of feminists in Italy (2014). Feminist historiography, born in the 1970s, has largely ignored Italian women's history between the end of the Second World War and the explosion of second-wave feminism in the 1970s. Only in the last 15 years have academics started to address the achievements of pre-second-wave feminists, drawing attention to the impact of women's activism in those years on the advancement of women's rights and, more generally, on the creation of a democratic state in Italy (Gabrielli 2005; Casalini 2010; Seymour 2010; Pojmann 2013; Tambor 2014).

The reform of maternity rights was initially conceived in the context of the broad collaboration between parties that characterised the period between June 1944 and May 1947. It was subsequently discussed in a strongly polarised parliament: on one side the Christian Democratic Party (DC), on the other the Democratic Popular Front (FDP), consisting of the Communist and Socialist parties. At the beginning of the Cold War, women politicians, potentially united by 'women's interests', were thus sharply divided by their formal political allegiances. While this article mainly focuses on their activity in Parliament, the campaigns conducted by newly established women's mass organisations, such as the left-wing *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI – Union of Italian Women) and the Catholic *Centro Italiano Femminile* (CIF – Italian Women's Centre), are also discussed. The immediate post-war years saw strong competition between the UDI and the CIF to attract new members and support for their organisations; rival initiatives, such as welfare services, were launched at a local as well as national level (Casalini 2005, 143–145; Gabrielli 2000). By analysing the parliamentary history of Law 860, the article offers new insights into how and on what basis women's cross-party collaboration on this specific gender issue was possible and could be decisive, even when the division between parties was at its height.

The origins of Law 860: from collaboration to competition

On 14 June 1948 a group of women deputies belonging to the Popular Front, led by Teresa Noce, presented a draft bill on the 'protection of motherhood' to Parliament.⁴ This proposed paid maternity leave for working mothers equal to 100 per cent of their wages for either three months (for industrial workers and others in heavy jobs) or six weeks (all others) before childbirth, and eight weeks afterwards. Furthermore, it proposed a lump sum allowance for the self-employed and housewives, a ban on dismissing pregnant employees, the creation of childcare facilities in the

workplace, two breaks each day to breast-feed babies, and free medical care for all women during pregnancy and childbirth.

The Noce draft was first developed within the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), the trade union confederation, in 1947. Until May 1947, when the exclusion of the Communists and Socialists from the coalition government increased political tension, the different wings of the CGIL had been able to collaborate within its *Commissione Femminile Nazionale* (Women's National Committee). Women with allegiances to both the Popular Front and the DC had worked together to prepare the *Carta della Lavoratrice* (Charter of the Working Woman), which aimed to establish the right of women to work, and thus the need for their protection, in view of the contemporary realities:

five million women workers are a force that needs to be used for national reconstruction [...] the present social and economic situation does not yet permit the realisation of that family salary which will allow women, as wives and mothers, to dedicate themselves, without other concerns, to the care of their families.⁵

Women in the DC and the Popular Front held different theoretical views about women's role in society and the family. Generally speaking, the Catholics emphasised the maternal role of women and marginalised their employment, while the Left considered access to paid work to be the necessary condition for women's emancipation.⁶ In this instance, however, women politicians who held different ideas about the woman's role were able to come together over support and protection for women who were forced to work out of economic necessity. At the CGIL's congress in June 1947, the last before it split the following year, the *Carta* was approved and the Women's National Committee announced its logical consequence, a campaign for the protection of motherhood.⁷

When the war ended, Fascist legislation on maternity rights was still in force. This granted four weeks of unpaid leave before childbirth and six weeks after for certain categories of workers, and a grant at the birth that had not increased with inflation, and was thus almost worthless.⁸ On 30 July 1946, *Confindustria* (the Italian employers' federation) and the CGIL reached an inter-confederation agreement granting paid maternity leave at two-thirds of wages for three months before and six weeks after childbirth. This was meant to be a temporary solution, pending a general reform of maternity rights that was being debated within the relevant ministries.⁹

After a series of meetings involving women belonging to all categories of workers, the CGIL drafted a decree which was presented to the Ministry of Labour on 4 October 1947 by the CGIL Women's National Committee in the presence of representatives of the main occupation-based federations, including Teresa Noce, the general secretary of the fabric trade federation (FIOT).¹⁰ The Ministry of Labour did not, however, call a meeting to discuss this draft in the months that followed. The increasing intensity of party polarisation rendered broad-based action less and less feasible and gradually stifled collaboration between the different wings within the CGIL. Instead, competition began between the campaigning activity by women in Catholic organisations and the Popular Front.

After the elections of April 1948, the Communist Party decided that its women's organisations should adopt the CGIL proposal and the women deputies in the Popular Front should present the draft to Parliament.¹¹ What was originally a gender issue, on which women had collaborated, became an instrument that divided them according to their political affiliation. In this increasingly competitive atmosphere, the Communist Party decision to present the Noce draft to Parliament was followed by a series of meetings of the UDI leadership at the beginning of June 1948 to organise the campaign, a task 'to be done as soon as possible in order not to let Christian Democracy steal it'.¹²

Before we analyse the Popular Front campaign, the relationship between the UDI and the Communist Party in that period needs to be clarified. The UDI has previously been dismissed by feminist historiography as a mere conveyor belt that produced conventional policies and failed to develop an independent voice. Recent scholarship, however, has reassessed its degree of autonomy, which varied over time, and has shown its effectiveness in introducing a gender perspective into male-dominated politics (Casalini 2010; Gabrielli 2005; Pojmann 2008; Seymour 2010) and, more generally, in providing a space, even during the period when its autonomy was limited, where women could participate fully in the newborn democratic state (Gabrielli 2005). As the case of Law 860 will illustrate, in the immediate post-war years the UDI was essentially an auxiliary organisation of the Communist Party: its campaign on this reflected the Communist programme. Only from 1956 onwards did the UDI gain increasing autonomy from the Communist Party and its political position (Casalini 2010; Gabrielli 2005). As the next section will show, this did not prevent the UDI from making an essential contribution to a campaign led by women.

The Popular Front campaign

The Communist Party decided on a plan for the campaign, to take place during June and July 1948. It was to be conducted on two levels, a trade-union action and a broader struggle led by the UDI, and centred on a petition in support of the Noce draft. This device was intended to demonstrate a consensus in favour of these demands. At the same time, the petition was to be used to support a new draft before Parliament, should the original draft not be discussed or be rejected.¹³

The Communist Party planned to launch the petition at meetings and assemblies organised both by Popular Front trade unionists and by the UDI. The Noce draft would be explained and discussed, and it was decided that, whenever possible, women deputies would be involved in meetings and assemblies. A *Festa della Mamma* (celebration of mothers) would be held during June in factories, villages and neighbourhoods.¹⁴

Although the Noce draft clearly included women's right to work, this demand was omitted from the left-wing campaign because of its controversial nature. In a period of high unemployment, the idea that jobs for men should be prioritised was popular. Maria Luisa Righi has highlighted how female trade unionists found fighting for women's right to work increasingly difficult, faced with a pervasive image of working women as 'young ladies eager for silk stockings and lipstick' with no regard for the tragic situation of unemployed veterans (1999, 53).

Generally speaking, the campaign for the Noce draft focussed on its health aspects, particularly the child's health rather than the mother's. The UDI encouraged its local branches to engage in a range of actions:

... to invite widely respected doctors and midwives to hold meetings on the health aspects [...]; to conduct an appropriate campaign in the local press using articles by well-known figures from the medical and political spheres, in particular documenting the serious consequences of unsupported motherhood: high infant mortality rates, as seen in the official statistics, illness, poorly-paid pregnant women unable to afford the food they need, and so on.¹⁵

The UDI also prepared a detailed briefing for speeches by local activists during the campaign. The briefing suggested that the recent increase in infant mortality and morbidity rates was the main reason behind the Noce draft: a point explaining 'why the women deputies belonging to the Popular Front demand support for motherhood' referred to this data.¹⁶

The emphasis on health rather than women's right to work can be explained by the need to deploy an argument that was more palatable both to Catholic women and to men on the left.

Similarly, left-wing women politicians tried to take the heat out of the debate by focusing on children's wellbeing rather than women's rights.

The response of the government and the Catholic campaign

On 2 July 1948 the government tabled its own draft legislation on maternity rights for working mothers, endorsed by the Minister of Labour, Amintore Fanfani. Its provisions were more limited than those in the Noce draft: paid maternity leave at 75 per cent of the woman's wages for six weeks before and after childbirth, or ten weeks before and after childbirth for those working in unhealthy environments. The proposals only covered women in paid employment, and proposed similar arrangements for childcare, breast-feeding and unfair dismissal as in the Noce draft. Interestingly, as they had been for the Left, health concerns were a crucial motivation for this bill. By targeting infant mortality, infant morbidity and women's occupational diseases, the law was intended to improve the life expectancy of children.¹⁷

However, the Fanfani bill was not the only proposal emerging from the governing party. On 17 November 1948 a group of DC deputies, led by Maria Federici, proposed draft legislation on 'assistance to some categories of pregnant women and new mothers and to their children' to Parliament. This was designed to cover all the women excluded from the Fanfani draft, who would be entitled to free medical care while pregnant and during childbirth. They would receive a daily allowance of 300 *lire* for the six weeks before and eight weeks after childbirth, and a layette for their baby. Babies would be entitled to free medical care during their first year. All these provisions were to come from the *Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia* (ONMI – National Agency for the Protection of Maternity and Infancy). As emphasised by Bruno Fassina, a parliamentary deputy and one of the leaders of the *Associazioni Cristiane dei Lavoratori Italiani* (ACLI – Christian Associations of Italian Workers), who was also a signatory of the Federici draft, this demonstrated that Catholic women were committed to the project originally agreed by the CGIL which had aimed to protect all mothers.¹⁸

The Federici draft was not discussed in Parliament. The DC's *Direzione Nazionale* (National Committee) had in fact previously asked Federici not to submit it to Parliament as it was considered unaffordable.¹⁹ If we look at Federici's previous political and union activity, it may become clear why she pursued her proposal so vigorously. Between 1944 and 1950, she was arguably the most influential woman within the Catholic movement. In 1944 she was elected as the delegate to the ACLI national committee with responsibilities for women, and was also appointed president of the CIF. As a member of the Constituent Assembly and of the *Commissione dei 75*, Federici played a key role in debates regarding equal pay, women's access to all careers, and maternity rights. In 1948, she was elected as a Christian Democrat deputy in the new Parliament, but never held a prominent position within the Party (Morelli 2007; Dau Novelli 2009, 37–38). Moreover, her strong personality and commitment to legislation on social issues were not appreciated by all sectors of the Catholic movement. Her brilliant but controversial career started to decline in 1950 when she was forced to resign as president of the CIF: she had been attempting to make the organisation truly autonomous, while *Azione Cattolica*, the Church's lay organisation, intended to gain more control over it. Subsequently, she gradually withdrew from active politics (Gaiotti De Biase 2010, 71–72).

Right from the start of her post-war political and union activity, Maria Federici had been very involved in the debate on working women, always supporting women's right to work.²⁰ As early as 1945, while the ACLI delegate for women, she published various articles in its magazine

Il giornale dei lavoratori requesting new legislation on female labour and crèches for working women.²¹ She dedicated particular attention to professional women, who had the duty, in her opinion, to contribute to the country's reconstruction with their expertise work.²² The belief in work as a means of personal development both for men and women was shared by part of the Catholic movement. However, this was a minority position in a world that extolled the housewife and called for a family wage. Federici never questioned that motherhood was a woman's fundamental duty; first as the ACLI delegate for women and subsequently as president of the CIF, she campaigned for laws to help working women be good mothers.

From the Catholic movement, the campaign for maternity rights was conducted by the CIF and the women's section of the ACLI. Both were critical of the Fanfani draft and favoured the original proposals by the CGIL; this can be seen in the CIF's publication of two declarations supporting the rights of working mothers in its magazine in June and July 1948, coinciding with the submissions of the Noce and Fanfani drafts to Parliament. The CIF requested the inclusion of more categories of women in the programme, the extension of maternity leave, improvements to maternity pay, and the mandatory establishment of childcare facilities in factories.²³ Similarly, the ACLI organised a series of women's assemblies in all its local offices and in factories with a high number of female employees. Speakers highlighted the Fanfani draft's shortcomings and demanded, for example, maternity pay at 100 per cent of wages for all women, as in the Noce draft, in order to safeguard the health of children.²⁴ More generally, beyond these meetings, the ACLI voiced its support for the Federici draft.²⁵

As the campaign for maternity rights illustrates, under Federici's leadership the CIF possessed a degree of autonomy from the DC, and was not afraid to express its own position. By contrast the *Movimento Femminile della Democrazia Cristiana* (MFDC), the women's section of the DC, did not participate in the campaign. Created as an instrument for the political education of women, at that point the MFDC was yet to develop any independence in its political position.²⁶ Its leaders expressed varying personal positions: its president, Maria Jervolino, was among the supporters of the Federici draft, whereas at the third national congress of the MFDC in October 1948 the vice president, Angela Gotelli, strongly criticised the high costs of the Noce draft and argued that 100 per cent maternity pay would deter employers from hiring women. She expressed lukewarm support for the Fanfani draft, and argued that women should return to the home:

Let's also think about the millions of men who are unemployed, and then let's demand that society organise itself in a better way. [...] If the woman could make running the home the centre of her life, their financial situation would immediately and rapidly be improved, as would the economic health of the country. (Gotelli 1966, 108–109)

The parliamentary history of Law 860

The Fanfani draft was examined first by the Chamber of Deputies' Labour and Welfare Committee. Significantly, Maria Federici was chosen to present the bill for the debate in the full Chamber. Her report stressed how the Committee's work had been complex, as a consensus on passing a philanthropic law was often in conflict with financial concerns, and specifically the fact that employers' contributions had to be set at a reasonable level. It had nevertheless decided to radically revise the draft in order to respond to people's needs and the demands of social justice. This would provide a social welfare law that surpassed previous provisions, conforming to standards set by the International Labour Organisation and ensuring the health of mothers and children.²⁷ Federici had a crucial role in proposing improvements. On her suggestion, the Committee's proposals also included all agricultural workers, those working from home, and

women in domestic service.²⁸ The payment was raised to 100 per cent of a woman's wages, thanks to an amendment suggested by her and Fassina.²⁹ Moreover, the duration of maternity leave was extended in line with the Noce draft.

The fact that the Committee presented a joint report, instead of separate majority and minority reports, suggests that all parties had reached a satisfactory compromise over the text. During the Chamber of Deputies debate, however, several DC deputies (some of whom were members of the Committee) questioned the proposed measures, primarily because of the potential economic impact on employers in those difficult times. The parliamentary history of Law 860 was characterised not only by the clash between the Left and the DC, but also by division within the Catholic movement. Some deputies were concerned about the costs of the programme, and probably not very interested in women's issues. Others, particularly Federici, considered the support for working mothers as a vital social duty, and pushed for social welfare laws.

As in the wider campaign, in Parliament the supporters of the Committee draft (from both the Left and the Christian Democratic Party) highlighted the health implications of the programme. More generally, they played on the shared respect for motherhood. 'If there is an issue that could unite us all in this Chamber, across parties, it is motherhood,' claimed Communist deputy Nadia Spano.³⁰ 'I consider it shameful and unacceptable that in this Italian Republic, founded on labour, some working mothers still have to carry out their duty of motherhood in such difficult and distressing conditions,' stated DC deputy Beniamino De Maria from across the political divide.³¹ In Parliament, as in the wider campaign, women's right to work had been sidelined by more traditional arguments about women's place in society, which united opinion across parties.

As a result, this discourse on motherhood put women politicians at the centre of the debate on what was described (and was probably perceived by themselves) as their own law: '[h]onourable members,' declared Teresa Noce, 'in conclusion I must emphasise once again that this law should not be debated as a law of the majority or of the minority, but as a law made by Italian mothers for Italian mothers.'³² During the parliamentary debates, women deputies often targeted those in other parties by appealing to their particular sensibilities and their experience as mothers: 'I appeal in particular to the Honourable Noce, who can express maternal sentiments so well; but I too can do this, as I am a mother just as she is.'³³ At the same time, women also blamed each other: '[i]t is shameful that such an amendment has also been signed by female colleagues! [...] I appeal to those women who have had the honour of being mothers.'³⁴ They also stressed their mutual understanding of each other as women. Significantly, Federici concluded one of her contributions by saying that '[w]ith regard to the Honourable Noce, she knows that, on the matter of protecting working mothers, we have never been opponents.'³⁵

The parliamentary debate's main protagonists were Federici and Noce. With regard to male deputies it was mainly union leaders, such as Giuseppe Di Vittorio, who took part. The fact that a high number of women participated is clear evidence of their interest in this legislation. They accounted for 45 of the 572 parliamentary deputies (7.8 per cent), but 15 women spoke in the debate, compared to about 30 men. More significantly, in many cases they emphasised that they were women representing Italian women. This confirms Tambor's idea that for many of 'the first 45,' the women elected to the first republican parliament of 1948–1953, it was more important to represent women than to represent their party (2014, 53). Even though they maintained strong political and ideological allegiances, their gender identity arguably made them more prepared to work across the political divide.

Eventually, women agricultural workers were included in the programme, but not those working from home or women in domestic service. The length of maternity leave remained in line with the Committee's proposal and payment at 80 per cent of wages, or a lump sum for agricultural

employees on temporary contracts, was agreed. The law also determined that an employee could not be fired because she was pregnant, and provided for the creation of childcare facilities in workplaces where more than 30 married women were employed, two breaks a day to breast-feed babies, and medical care during pregnancy and childbirth.

The virtues of the new law were extolled by those who had campaigned for it; in the following decades it continued to be seen as a pioneering reform, although it was ignored on a vast scale even by the state and local authorities, especially regarding the establishment of childcare facilities. It attempted to create a comprehensive system of provisions for working mothers and instituted a substantial period of maternity leave, comparing favourably with the twelve weeks suggested by the 1919 International Labour Conference in its Maternity Protection Convention (reiterated when revised in 1952).

Although Popular Front propaganda depicted the parliamentary debate as extremely fierce and the behaviour of the DC as unfair and treacherous, the bill's passage was relatively smooth, and quick in comparison with other legislation.³⁶ Some DC deputies did indeed question the measures proposed by the Committee, but a number of others supported the proposals and spoke up for the bill in Parliament. Moreover, because the two sides reached a relatively satisfactory agreement, the law was approved by a large majority (309 out of 354 votes). On 28 July 1950, the draft legislation was briefly debated by the Senate's Labour and Welfare Committee and approved during the same session.³⁷

The debate on Law 860 was used for party propaganda. At an early stage the Popular Front claimed the credit for it being passed. 'The approval of the law for the physical and financial protection of motherhood is a real victory won in Parliament by the deputies of the Popular Front, and in particular by the deputies of the CGIL,' reported the CGIL newsletter.³⁸ In particular, the Popular Front stressed how their deputies succeeded in this despite the reluctance of the Christian Democratic Party. As Noce observed:

1950 was the year when working women were able to achieve, for the majority of mothers in work, a law on the physical and financial protection of working mothers which, even if it still does not truly and completely protect all working mothers, represents an important step forwards in that direction, and is certainly the most democratic and progressive law that working women were able to impose [...] on a parliamentary majority and a government that was not at all democratic nor progressive.³⁹

In contrast, the law's enactment did not play an important part in Catholic propaganda in the short term. When it was mentioned, however, the conflict with the Left was emphasised.⁴⁰ In the atmosphere of the Cold War, both the Left and the Catholics stressed the differences between their respective positions and disregarded any inter-party collaboration.

The role of women politicians

In November 1950, Giuseppe Di Vittorio and Teresa Noce gave their colleague Oreste Lizzadri the CGIL booklet on Law 860, entitled *Una bella vittoria delle donne d'Italia, la nuova legge sulla tutela della madri lavoratrici* ('A great victory for Italian women, the new law on safeguards for working mothers'), together with a certificate as 'honorary new mother,' as he had 'contributed with intelligence and passion to the law's success'. Recalling this episode many years later, Lizzadri downplayed his own contribution but acknowledged that 'the very progressive law on working mothers was mainly inspired by Teresa Noce and was approved mainly thanks to her efforts.'⁴¹

Did women politicians play a greater role in the passing of Law 860? The efforts that women's organisations made during the campaign and the disproportionately high participation by women

deputies in parliamentary debates seem to confirm this hypothesis. At the same time, the episode above indicates the importance of support from male trade unionists on an issue that clearly involved labour law. Di Vittorio, among others, took an active part in the parliamentary debate, and his support as leader of the CGIL was crucial to the law's success. On the other side, the ACLI trade unionist Bruno Fassina, for example, played an important role in supporting Maria Federici during the Committee debates.

While the support of male trade unionists in positions of power contributed to the passing of a law on a gender issue, women had done most of the groundwork. Within both the Left and the Catholic movement, women's issues were generally delegated to women, who debated them within their own organisations. They were considered to be secondary and self-contained issues on each party's political agenda. However, we should also note that the campaign for maternity rights did not encounter strong opposition from all the male politicians (the decision by the DC National Committee being perhaps the only exception). Maternity rights were neither opposed nor high on the agenda.

This was also the case within the two male-dominated organisations that supported this law. The Noce draft was treated as a specifically female issue within the CGIL. Articles relating to its proposals appeared in the CGIL newsletter, but usually in the column *In difesa delle lavoratrici* ('In defence of working women'); it was seldom discussed in articles relevant to the labour movement as a whole. Furthermore, pieces discussing the draft were never given a prominent position. Significantly, even the passing of Law 860 did not feature in the newsletter's headlines.⁴²

Like the Left, Catholic organisations showed little interest in this gender issue. The ACLI newsletter *Il giornale dei lavoratori* did not report the passing of Law 860 until December 1950, when the legal text was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*.⁴³ The ACLI article appeared at the bottom of the newsletter's final page and also simply presented the text, without any comment. Unlike the Left, they did not exploit the passing of the law for political purposes. It would have been uncomfortable to claim responsibility for it within a Catholic movement so divided on the issue. Many years later, Maria Federici recalled the parliamentary history of Law 860 in these terms:

Because of internal and contradictory resistances, it often gave me the feeling, not of being in front of the bench of the speakers, but of being on the deck of a ship, with only a few seamen in my crew, trying to guide the law safely home. I cared a great deal about that law, because I was very aware that it was the first social welfare law of that Italian parliament, because by indescribable efforts I had managed to include previously neglected categories of women [...], and because I was achieving a goal that I had set myself five years earlier.⁴⁴

Women politicians, both Catholic and on the Left, were aware of their central role in the struggle for this law. They acknowledged those few male colleagues who supported them, but they did not expect the same commitment from them as from the other women. In her autobiography, Teresa Noce recalled the attitude of most of her male colleagues to the debate on maternity pay in a humorous vein:

[E]xhausted by the long debate, and deciding that the law, with regard to the paragraphs already approved, could despite everything be seen as the best law approved by the Italian Parliament, [they] were willing to accept the payment for maternity leave at 75 per cent, which represented a reasonable increase anyway. (Noce 1975, 386)

It was thanks to her tenacity and her forthright verbal confrontation with Di Vittorio and Palmiro Togliatti, the Communist leader, that it was agreed to support her in continuing the debate on that paragraph. While the responsibility for women's issues, apparently of secondary importance, may have been delegated to women, they came to see themselves as the only ones

with the necessary commitment to passing a just law for all Italian mothers. Women politicians had in fact been discussing new ideas regarding women's status and their welfare within their organisations ever since these were established. In September 1944 the UDI had been established in order to set up childcare facilities for the children of working women and to organise conferences and debates on maternal and infant welfare.⁴⁵ Similarly, the newly-created CIF had set up committees to examine issues such as the problems experienced by working women, education, and infant welfare.⁴⁶ Building on this experience, women politicians strove to rescue the reform of maternal and infant welfare from the margins of their party's programmes and place this firmly on the political agenda.

How did women deputies relate to their female colleagues in opposing parties? The debate was generally more consensual than debates where male politicians took the lead. Interestingly, all campaigners emphasised the health implications of the law, leaving aside divisive arguments. In particular, women on the left avoided mentioning women's right to work both during the campaign and in the debate. Instead, the campaigners and debaters often stressed how women had to work for financial reasons, not simply from choice. By stressing the necessity rather than the choice of work, left-wing women politicians could reach out to Catholic women more easily.

Left-wing women politicians reported support from Catholic women among the factory workers, but constant difficulties with their DC colleagues during the campaign.⁴⁷ This was particularly true after 1948, when competition started in earnest between the two main fronts. However, the records of parliamentary proceedings suggest that Federici worked with the Left to create a joint proposal and strongly supported this during the parliamentary debate. It is also true that some DC women deputies supported several amendments limiting measures in the bill, although they did not play a central role in the debate. Their behaviour reflected the divisions within the Catholic front, while women on the Left were united.

The hostility of left-wing women towards their DC counterparts became more apparent after the law had been passed, and became a key feature of left-wing propaganda in the following years. DC women were accordingly presented as traitors and saboteurs. To the question 'Why should we vote for the women candidates of the Popular Front?' UDI propagandists were supposed to answer:

Because, if we look at the parliamentary proceeding from 1948 until now, while we can see that the women deputies of the Popular Front fought hard to defend women's interests and peace, it is clear that the others did the opposite. [...] How did the DC women deputies behave? [...] the law to support working mothers, put forward and strongly supported by Socialist and Communist women deputies, was the law that faced the most hostility from the women deputies of the DC. (*Commissione Nazionale di Stampa e Propaganda 1956*, 3: 11–12)

This position can be explained by the increased tension caused by the developing Cold War, which inhibited overt cross-party collaboration and discouraged any recognition that there had been room to bargain with part of the Catholic front in the past. Now, for propaganda reasons, the shared endeavour of women on opposing sides (and of men who had supported their demands) could not be openly acknowledged to have existed during the campaign for the law.

When, later, the relations between parties improved, the collective efforts by women in the different parties in the passing of this law was emphasised instead. In the late 1970s Gisella Floreanini, a Communist deputy who took part in the debate on Law 860 both in the Committee and in Parliament, had this to say:

She [Teresa Noce] played a predominant role in the drafting of that law, which was then approved in Parliament thanks to her direct action, but in agreement with Maria Federici from the Christian Democratic Party. Because the law would never have passed without that alliance. [...] The Christian Democratic group had its role too. In that way, the law that we call Noce Law was passed, but in reality it was the law of those two women. (*Gerosa 1979*, 210)

More recently, Viviana Luciani, another protagonist in this debate, recalled the discussions on maternal and infant welfare in that period:

Even if we [women politicians] were on two opposing fronts, strongly hostile to each other, on these themes we often reached ... not a real agreement, but a sort of mutual understanding, because an agreement would have been too much, the conditions of the two main parties, the Christian Democratic Party and the Communist Party, did not permit open agreements, but it was possible to have mutual understandings. [...] When we were debating in Parliament, we tried to reach a mutual understanding, which would not be an open agreement, but actually you could understand that we were both basically on the same side.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Although the relationship between left-wing and Catholic women politicians in the immediate post-war years was characterised by competition, the parliamentary history of Law 860 suggests that there remained room for bargaining at the highest political level. While all left-wing women deputies campaigned vigorously for the protection of motherhood, under the strong leadership of Teresa Noce, not all their Catholic women colleagues actively supported this. However, those who did, in particular Maria Federici, were crucial in ensuring that the law was passed. As a member of the ruling party and leader of the CIF, she could exert pressure to ensure that the demands, strongly supported by women on the Left, were debated and ultimately met. Without her efforts these demands would probably have remained frustrated. The shared endeavours of both Catholic and left-wing women deputies resulted in the passing of an important reform in Italy's post-war welfare system.

This article is primarily a case study that confirms the crucial role played by women politicians in shaping social policy. Women then continued to set the agenda in the field of maternal and infant welfare in post-war Italy. A similar dynamic can be seen in the further reform of maternity and childcare legislation in 1971 after sustained campaigning by women's organisations.

The passing of Law 860 was also made possible by a certain degree of cross-party collaboration. This reform was ultimately enacted with the support of both the DC and the Popular Front. During the debate, both groups agreed on the necessity of establishing a working woman's right to a paid and relatively long period of maternity leave, and on the duty of employers to provide childcare facilities, among other measures. Compromise on the legislation was possible because of the points of agreement between the two major political groups. As discussed, debates in Parliament were intentionally rendered as consensual as possible, by avoiding divisive arguments and focussing on points that could be widely accepted. These intentions explain the lack of references by left-wing women to a woman's right to work. The detailed analysis of this article substantiates what previous studies have suggested: that compromise and the ability to work across political divides were decisive for this welfare reform.

More generally, this article contributes to the history of a group of women which after many decades of invisibility has recently started to gain recognition as a cohort that played a crucial role in the advancement of women's rights. It shows how this group was also of critical importance in the development of the welfare state.

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Notes

1. The adjective 'Catholic' is used in this article to indicate political and ideological affiliation to the Christian Democratic Party (DC) and related groups, or to other groups and organisations linked to the Catholic Church with a focus on social or political concerns such as, in particular, the *Centro Italiano Femminile* (CIF); it is thus not used to indicate religious faith. The adjective 'left-wing' here indicates membership of the Popular Front (the Communist and Socialist parties) and related or affiliated groups and organisations such as the *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI). There were in fact women of Catholic faith within the Popular Front and the UDI.
2. Legge 26 agosto 1950, n. 860, *Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri*.
3. Only a small number of historical studies draw attention to the role of women politicians and activists in the creation of welfare services; these relate to services for children at a local level in the cities of Reggio Emilia and Modena (Sigman 2003; Finetti 2002). See also Gagliani (1992).
4. Atti Parlamentari (hereafter AP), Camera dei Deputati (hereafter CD), Disegni di legge e relazioni, n. 32, Noce Longo Teresa et al., *Per la tutela della maternità*, 14 June 1948.
5. "Mozione sulle rivendicazioni delle donne", *Notiziario della Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (hereafter NCGIL), 20 September 1947, p. 16.
6. Several studies have highlighted the discrepancy between theory and practice within the Communist Party and organisations close to it. For example, the mainstream Communist press exalted the role of the housewife and did not present paid work as a means of emancipation at all (Casalini 2005). See also Bellassai (2000).
7. For a detailed description of how women's issues were dealt with at the unitary congress of the CGIL, see Righi (1999, 60–67).
8. AP, CD, Disegni di legge e relazioni, n. 37, Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale: Fanfani et al., *Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri*, 2 July 1948, p. 2.
9. "Proteggere la maternità", NCGIL, 30 July 1947, pp. 28–29.
10. "Proposte della CGIL per la tutela della maternità", NCGIL, 10 September 1947, pp. 17–18; "Il progetto sulla maternità presentato al governo", NCGIL, 10 October 1947, p. 4.
11. "Verbale 24–25 maggio 1948", p. 2; and attachment "Piani di lavoro, Direttive per la realizzazione della risoluzione del Comitato Centrale del 4-6/5/1948", p. 6, Archivio dell'Istituto Gramsci (hereafter AIG), Fondo Mosca, Verbali della direzione, MF 199.
12. "Riunione di Segreteria del 4–6–48", Archivio Centrale dell'UDI (hereafter ACUDI), Cronologico, b. 18, f. 203, sf. 1 (quotation from p. 2, speech by Maria Maddalena Rossi).
13. Circular letter to all provincial branches, 25 June 1948, ACUDI, Cronologico, b. 18, f. 203, sf. 2.
14. "Piano di lavoro femminile", p. 6, attachment to "Verbale 24–25 maggio 1948", AIG, Fondo Mosca, Verbali della direzione, MF 199.
15. "Il Governo approvi subito la legge proposta dalla CGIL", *Bollettino d'informazioni dell'UDI*, June 1948, ACUDI, Cronologico, b. 18, f. 203, sf. 2.
16. "Perché chiediamo la tutela della maternità?" *Bollettino d'informazioni dell'UDI*, July 1948, ACUDI, Cronologico, b. 18, f. 206, sf. 2.
17. AP, CD, Disegni di legge e relazioni, n. 37, Lavoro e Previdenza Sociale: Fanfani et al., *Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri*, 2 July 1948, pp. 1–5.
18. "Tutela della lavoratrice madre e assistenza alla maternità", *Informazioni sindacali*, November–December 1948, pp. 41–46.
19. "Seduta di Direzione a Montecitorio del 25 giugno 1948 ore 19", in Archivio Storico dell'Istituto 'Luigi Sturzo' (hereafter ASILS), Fondo DC, Direzione Nazionale, Verbali, sc. 2, f. 11.
20. See, for example, her speech at the *Convegno di intervento sindacale*, reported in "Le lavoratrici a congresso", *Popolo e Libertà*, 25 May 1947, ASILS, Fondo Falcucci, f. 1.

21. See, for example, “Nuove leggi per le donne”, *Il Giornale dei Lavoratori*, 23–30 January 1945, p. 5; “I nidi per i figli delle lavoratrici”, *Il Giornale dei Lavoratori*, 6–13 February 1945, p.5.
22. “Il CIF fa appello alla professionista”, *Bollettino di attività del CIF* (hereafter BCIF), anno1 (1945), n. 2, p. 3.
23. “Tutela delle lavoratrici madri”, BCIF, June 1948.
24. Circular letter from Luciana Lancini to all regional and provincial ACLI women’s representatives, 25 November 1949, and its attachment, “Schema di relazione sul progetto di legge per la tutela della maternità”, Archivio Storico ACLI, Fondo ACLI Lavoratrici, Circolari, b. 1.
25. See, for example, “La tutela della maternità in Parlamento” and “Le rivendicazioni delle ACLI”, *Azione Sociale*, 5 June 1949, p. 2.
26. In the 1950s the MFDC gradually moved towards a position of autonomy. For a detailed analysis of this shift, see Boscato (2010).
27. AP, CD, Disegni di legge e relazioni, n. 37–A, *Relazione della XI Commissione Permanente*, 29 April 1950, pp. 1–3.
28. AP, CD, Bollettino delle Commissioni, a. II, n. 27, XI Commissione, 16 November 1949, p. 153; AP, CD, Bollettino delle Commissioni, a. II, n. 29, XI Commissione, 18 November 1949, p. 162.
29. AP, CD, Bollettino delle Commissioni, a. II, n. 47, XI Commissione, 26 January 1950, pp. 247–248.
30. Speech by Nadia Spano, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 4 July 1950 (a.m.), p. 20339.
31. Speech by Beniamino De Maria, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 14 July 1950 (a.m.), p. 20896.
32. Speech by Teresa Noce, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 27 June 1950 (a.m.), p. 20086.
33. Speech by Angela Maria Cingolani Guidi, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 18 July 1950 (p.m.), p. 21033.
34. Speech by Teresa Noce, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 6 July 1950 (a.m.), p. 20489.
35. Speech by Maria Federici, AP, CD, I leg., Discussioni, 27 June 1950 (a.m.), p. 20095.
36. For example, ten years passed between Lina Merlin’s first parliamentary proposal to abolish the system regulating prostitution and the passing of the ‘Legge Merlin’, as it was known, in 1958.
37. AP, Senato della Repubblica, I leg., X Commissione, 33a riunione in sede deliberante, 28 July 1950.
38. “La legge sulla tutela della madri lavoratrici”, NCGIL, 30 July 1950, p. 550.
39. “Le lotte vittoriose del 1950, pegno di ulteriori progressi nel 1951”, Archivio Personale di Teresa Noce, (hereafter APNOCE), b. 1, f. 1.
40. See, for example: Statement by Maria Federici in “Decennale della Costituzione”, *Donne d’Italia*, February 1958, pp. 8–9; D’Inzillo (1967, 22).
41. “Articoli vari di Estella e su Estella”, AIG, Archivio delle donne Camilla Ravera, serie 6, ss. 13, b. 4, f. 16.
42. “La legge sulla tutela delle madri lavoratrici”, NCGIL, 30 July 1950, pp. 550–552.
43. “La nuova legge sulla tutela della lavoratrice madre”, *Il giornale dei lavoratori*, 7 December 1950, p. 2.
44. Maria Federici, “La tutela della maternità”, *Donne d’Italia*, May 1964, p. 26.
45. “Costituiamo l’Unione delle Donne Italiane”, *Noi Donne*, special issue, 10 October 1944, pp. 2–3.
46. “Vita del CIF”, BCIF, June 1945, p. 2.
47. See, for example, “Intervento Noce, Budapest 1948”, APNOCE, b. 1, f. 3.
48. Interview recorded by the author with Luciana Viviani, Rome, 26 March 2010.

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Italian Abstract

Lo sviluppo di politiche sociali per la maternità e l'infanzia è stato profondamente influenzato dall'azione delle donne. Questo articolo esplora il ruolo svolto dalle 'donne politiche' italiane nell'approvazione della legge sulla tutela della maternità del 1950. Vengono esaminate le campagne portate avanti sia dalle donne di sinistra che dalle donne cattoliche. Vengono inoltre analizzate le argomentazioni e le strategie di cui le donne politiche si servirono per fare in modo che questa questione femminile diventasse parte dell'agenda politica. Particolare attenzione è rivolta all'iter parlamentare di questa normativa. Mentre la legge veniva dibattuta, la contrapposizione fra i partiti era al suo apice, e le organizzazioni femminili erano in forte competizione tra loro. Ciononostante, a livello parlamentare, una collaborazione trasversale tra donne è stata possibile su questa specifica questione, ed è stata un fattore decisivo per l'approvazione della legge.