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WOMAN'S CONDITION: THE CASE
OF POSTWAR ITALY

Introduction

In this article we propose (a) to describe the characteristics of the female labor force, the organization of the family, and the participation of women in groups and organizations representing "feminine" political and labor union interests; and (b) to interpret the case of Italy by making comparisons, partial and otherwise, with other advanced capitalist countries.

Since an adequate historical study could not be attempted here, we will concentrate our analysis on the present situation. Nevertheless, we shall try to give a brief schematic description of certain elements to pinpoint the principal stages in the evolution of the Italian economic and social system from 1945 to the present, insofar as they are significant for an analysis of the feminine condition:

From 1945 to the early fifties

- reconstruction and first stage of development;
- mass unemployment; high percentage of the population

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- engaged in agriculture;
- low wage levels.

Late fifties – early sixties

- sustained economic development: "the Italian miracle";
- concentration of development in the urban areas of the North;
- full employment; mass exodus from agriculture; internal migration;
- growth in real wages.

From the 1962-63 recession to the late sixties

- economic recession, followed by industrial restructuring;
- expulsion of women, youth, and the elderly from the work force;
- increase in work at home;
- increase in real wages.

Early seventies

- probable reversal of the previous trends; economic restructuring and increased employment;
- stability or reduction in real wages.

Our analysis will focus on the two last phases, i.e., the entire 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, a period for which the data are only suggestive of potential future trends. The analysis will concentrate especially on the conditions typical of the developed areas of Northern Italy (1); the characteristics of the South, as well as an interpretation of the overall development of the country in terms of the dual regional aspect that is still present, will not be dealt with here.

I. Characteristics of the Female Work Force

Our point of departure for our analysis of feminine labor is

provided by the data in the tables.

Table 1
Rates of Activity According to Sex

Country	Men	Women	Country	Men	Women
USA (71)	53.9	30.4	Germany (71)	58.7	30.2
Canada (69)	53.5	24.8	Norway (69)	56.4	23.6
Japan (71)	61.7	37.6	Netherlands (60)	56.8	16.1
Austria (70)	53.3	30.2	Switzerland (70)	63.9	32.4
Belgium (71)	56.1	26.1	Sweden (69)	60.0	37.8
Denmark (71)	59.6	37.8	England (70)	60.4	32.2
Finland (70)	55.1	37.5	Italy (71)	54.1	19.2
France (72)	55.0	29.7			

Sources: B.I.T., Annuaire des statistiques du travail 1972, for all countries considered except Italy (I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, 1972), Canada, and Sweden (O.C.D.E., Bulletin statistique, in I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972).

A first point to be made in describing the Italian situation is that, of the 15 Western countries considered (Table 1), Italy and the Netherlands have the lowest female labor force participation; indeed, seven countries have rates above 30%, six between 20% and 30%, and only two lower than 20%: Italy and the Netherlands. Moreover, the rate has shown a steady decrease in Italy throughout the 1960s from 24.9% in 1960, to 20.8% in 1965, and 19.2% in 1971. (2)

A second factor typical of the Italian situation is the quite pronounced difference between the male and female participation rates. Italy is one of the countries in which the difference between men and women in labor force participation rates (Table 1), as well as in the rates by age group (Table 3), is the greatest. In other words, the male labor market shows patterns that do not essentially diverge from the modal situa-

tion, while the female labor market represents a considerable anomaly compared with the modal situation.

Table 2
Percentage Composition of
the Work Force by Sex

Country	Men	Women	Country	Men	Women
USA	62.7	37.3	Germany	63.7	36.3
Canada	67.8	32.2	Netherlands	76.2	23.8
Japan	60.6	39.4	Norway	69.5	30.5
Austria	61.3	38.7	Sweden	61.3	38.7
Belgium	67.4	32.6	England	63.3	36.7
Denmark	61.6	38.4	Italy	73.1	26.9

For all the countries considered the data apply to 1969, except for Italy (1971) and the Netherlands (1960).

Sources: O.C.D.E., Bulletin statistique, in I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, 1972, for all countries except Italy (I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972).

This detail is revealed especially by the breakdown by sex of the Italian work force as compared to that of other countries (Table 2). While women constitute between 30% and 40% of the total work force in 13 of the 15 industrial countries (i.e., one woman worker, on the average, for every two male workers), in Italy this percentage is 26.9% (i.e., a little more than one woman for every three male workers).

The third point of relevance here is the qualitative rather than quantitative characteristics of female participation in the work force. Table 4 shows the participation curves by age group for some advanced capitalist countries. Whereas the male participation curves are extremely simple and quite

Table 3a
Rates of Activity for Age Groups (1965)

Age groups (men)	Germany	Austria	France	Norway	Netherlands	England	Sweden	Switzerland	USA	Italy**
15-19	67.8	79.1	57.7	44.4	57.0	73.0	57.0	69.2	44.0*	42.1
20-24	89.5	88.3	89.5	81.9	89.5	96.0	78.0	89.7	86.6	68.3
25-29	95.1	96.9	96.4	94.3	97.1	99.0	95.0	97.0	96.1	93.9
30-34	98.3	98.4	97.2	98.0	98.6	99.0	97.0	99.0		98.2
35-39	98.2	97.5	97.1	98.0	98.7	99.0	96.0	99.2		98.2
40-44	97.5	97.0	96.7	98.0	98.5	99.0	96.0	99.0	96.0	97.4
45-49	96.6	96.2	95.2	97.6	98.1	98.0	96.0	98.7		95.4
50-54	94.7	93.9	92.3	96.0	96.8	96.0	96.0	98.0	94.2	91.1
55-59	90.0	86.0	84.3	96.0	93.4	94.0	94.0	96.0	88.7	81.1
60-64	77.9	62.0	66.9	89.2	80.8	90.0	82.0	89.0	76.5	46.9
65-69	35.1		32.9	69.6	29.7	39.0	50.5	59.0	42.0	21.2
70-74	21.0	15.0	20.7							
75-..	11.0		12.1	17.5	10.0	16.0	18.0	31.0	18.3	6.6

*14-19 years.

**For Italy the data relate to 1971.

Sources: For Italy, I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, 1972; for all other countries, O.C.D.E., l'Évolution démographique de 1965 à 1980 en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord, Paris, 1966.

similar for all the countries considered — with one peak at 35-55 years — the female employment curves are more complicated and more varied. The most common picture shows two peaks corresponding to the age groups in which participation in the labor force is greatest (i.e., the young and very young — 15-25 years, and 35-40 and above) and one minimum corresponding to the age at which most women marry and have chil-

Table 3b
Rates of Activity for Age Groups (1965)

Age groups (women)	Germany	Austria	France	Norway	Netherlands	England	Sweden	Switzerland	USA	Italy**
15-19	66.0	73.9	44.1	38.4	60.0	73.0	49.0	63.0	29.1*	31.5
20-24	71.1	75.1	61.5	46.5	55.2	60.0	66.0	63.5	49.8	43.1
25-29	50.5	58.9	45.1	26.1	22.5	40.0	53.0	35.0		33.9
30-34	44.2	54.9	39.7	20.1	15.3	38.0	49.0	26.0	38.4	30.2
35-39	45.4	55.2	39.8	20.1	15.5	44.5	59.0	26.0		29.4
40-44	46.7	53.1	41.5	22.0	16.0	50.5	58.0	27.3	45.8	31.3
45-49	44.3	50.9	44.3	22.2	17.1	51.0	58.0	28.6		29.9
50-54	40.8	47.2	44.3	26.9	16.5	49.8	57.0	29.8	50.5	25.9
55-59	34.3	38.0	41.0	27.5	13.8	43.3	47.0	29.2	46.6	17.7
60-64	22.3	17.0	31.3	22.9	9.0	23.8	30.0	24.5	33.7	10.3
65-69	11.9		15.8	17.8	4.2		14.5	16.5	17.1	5.0
70-74	7.1	7.1	8.4			6.2				
75-..	2.8		4.5	3.0	1.5		3.0	7.0	5.8	1.2

*14-19 years.

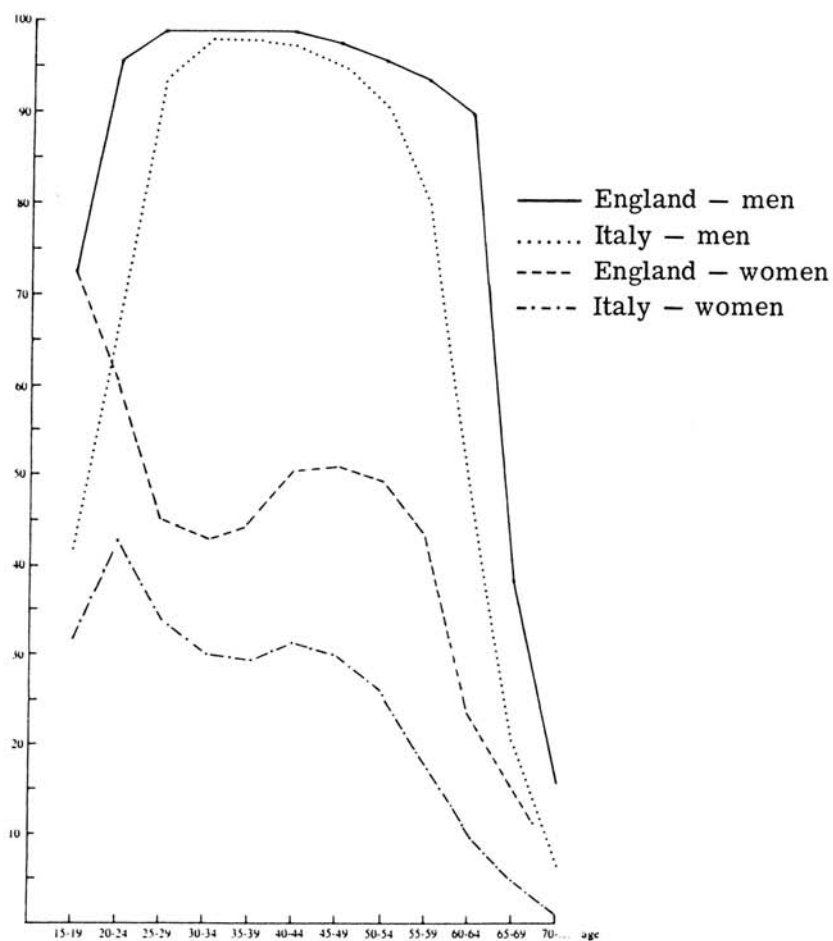
**For Italy the data relate to 1971.

Sources: For Italy, I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, 1972; for all other countries, O.C.D.E., l'Evolution démographique de 1965 à 1980 en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord, Paris, 1966.

dren. (3) Italy constitutes an exception to this pattern, even if one less pronounced than was the case under the first and second points. After the first peak, corresponding to the youngest age groups, the curve shows no further significant rise; rather, there is a continuous decrease, which waxes or wanes according to the age group.

To bring out more sharply the uniqueness of the Italian situa-

Table 4
Rates of Activity by Sex and Age Groups
(England and Italy)



Sources: For Italy, I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, 1972; for England, O.C.D.E., l'Évolution démographique de 1965 à 1980 en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord, Paris, 1966.

tion relative to the situation most common in the other Western countries, let us now compare it with another particular case, that of England, an advanced European capitalist country of moderate size. The United Kingdom is, generally speaking, representative of the trends common in the female labor markets in the countries under consideration. From the statistics presented in Tables 3 and 4 we can gain a general notion of the occupational careers of the typical English and Italian woman:

a) After finishing formal schooling, English girls enter the labor market in the same numbers as boys of the same age: the employment figures for the 15-19 age group is quite high (73%) and practically the same as for boys. The following period, from age 20 to 35, during which the remainder of the nonemployed male population enters the labor market, is the period during which English women get married and have preschool age children (in 1968, 29% of girls married before the age of 19, and 85% before the age of 24). (4) This period is marked by a massive exodus of women from the labor market, reducing the female labor participation rate by half (38% of those 30 to 34 years old). From the age of 35 onward, i.e., when most women have school-age children, considerable numbers reenter the labor market, so that the participation rate for women between the ages of 45 and 49 exceeds 50% and then falls again at the age of retirement.

b) A glance at participation rates by age in Italy reveals that while the curve for men is similar to that for English men, the curve for women diverges considerably from its counterpart in England. In the first place, the presence of young women is very much lower than that for English women of the same age. The participation rate for the 15-19 age group is very much lower than in England (31.5% as against 73%) and is also lower than the participation rate for Italian males of the same age (31.5% vs. 42.1%). The group with the highest employment rate is the 20- to 24-year-olds (43.1%). Thereafter the curve falls relatively rapidly, without any further significant rise. The decline is particularly sharp during two periods: at the age of retirement and in the period during which children are born and

are small. It is quite different from the English pattern. In 1968 only 11% of Italian women married before 19 and 59% before 24. Moreover, half of the women who had their first children at this point were at least 25, and 25% were at least 28. (5)

To sum up, in England practically all young women enter the labor market; a good number of them stop working to marry or to have children but then resume working when the children are older. The Italian pattern is more linear — at least at the surface — than the English pattern. Limited numbers of young women enter the labor market, after which a continuous exodus of the female work force ensues. The problem is therefore to interpret the restricted female participation rate as well as the failure of married women to return to work.

Various hypotheses have been put forward to interpret the patterns of participation in the labor market not only of women but also of all those segments of the population, (i.e., the elderly, young people, and handicapped) that represent a minority with respect to the group constituting the bulk of the labor force, namely, men between the ages of 30 and 50.

Indeed, a debate has arisen on this topic among economists and sociologists. (6) We shall present here only the principal hypotheses in extremely schematic, and hence simplified, form: (a) a large number of women retired voluntarily from the labor market as a result of improved living standards, improved educational standards, and the spread of middle-class life styles; (b) a large number of women withdrew, again voluntarily, not because they opted for the role of the housewife with the positive advantages it offers but rather to escape the lot of the working woman in a period during which the restructuring of the Italian economy entailed speedup, competition from young immigrants, and heavy work schedules; (c) a large number of women were driven out of the labor market during the crisis of the early 1960s. These factors in no sense involved a voluntary choice and an accepted alternative, but rather situations of hidden unemployment, which are not revealed by the criteria used in Italian statistical surveys.

Without going into the details of these interpretations, it is

enough to point out the central fact of a decline in female participation in the work force: the most important point is that a large number of women, particularly those over the age of 30, are no longer present on the labor market.

Nevertheless, these conclusions seem to be at variance with the information on the actual state of the labor market suggested in some circumstances and by different sources (results of surveys made by the Central Institute of Statistics on the non-employed population, studies on work done at home in certain areas of Italy, comparison with the patterns of female participation in other capitalist countries). On the basis of these factors, which are of course insufficient for drawing any definitive conclusions, it is reasonable to doubt that official figures reflect accurately the number of unemployed women remaining at home; hence the existence of a phenomenon of hidden unemployment, concentrated principally in those age groups which in other countries feature a notable return to the labor market, is not at all implausible. Whether they leave or are driven out of the main sector of the labor market (characterized by full-time work, job stability, guarantees of retirement benefits, and insurance, but also by rigid schedules and an inadequate number of legitimate absences and holidays, and hence by the lack of flexibility in the face of serious demands made by different groups in the work world), women reenter the labor market in a marginal situation. (7)

The typical job career of the Italian woman (we are here concerned exclusively with nonagricultural labor and labor in the urban industrial areas) would then present the following picture: entry of the young and very young into the labor market; exit of the majority of women from the labor market when they marry or have children; for some of these women the withdrawal is permanent, for others it is temporary, with their reentry occurring in most cases into marginal positions. In other countries, too, a large number of women, especially those who reenter the labor market after having raised their children at a young age, work under conditions typical of marginal labor; in particular, they take on part-time jobs. Moreover, no Western country has

resolved or even tried to resolve in any radical way the problem of female labor. In the most advanced situations convenient working hours, rest breaks, holidays, justified absences, retraining, improvement of certain social services, etc., have been introduced. But in any event, the female labor market remains distinct from the male labor market and for the most part is situated within the marginal market.

The unique feature of the Italian situation is that the greater part of female marginal labor is "gray labor," principally in the form of work done at home. Until a few years ago this type of labor was considered as a relation of production that had survived the passage of Italian capitalism from its archaic forms to its modern forms and hence was destined to disappear. Yet far from disappearing, during the period of 1968-72 it has been rapidly spreading. An estimate for the manufacturing industries alone gives a figure of between 1,015,000 and 1,505,000 for Italy, and between 230,000 and 275,000 for Lombardy. Women, according to this estimate, constituted between 77% and 90% of the total working at home, depending on the region and the production sector. Also for Lombardy, wages, including depreciation and maintenance of the machines in the hands of the worker, the lack of supplementary benefits (paid holidays, etc.), are on the average about 60% of the minimum contract wages paid to workers employed in factories. The average workday is 8.5 hours per day and 48 hours per week (in certain cases as much as 13-15 hours per day and 55 hours per week). The work pace is higher than that tolerated in factories, which is subject to union surveillance. Finally, there is no social security. (8) In short, this is a kind of marginal employment with especially high costs.

II. Structure and Function of the Family

Let us take a look at some data bearing on a variable that is fundamental for any analysis of the feminine condition: the structure and functioning of the family. For our present purposes we will limit our analysis of the family to its implications for the

woman's condition: in the family itself, on the job, in the experience of labor union membership or of political participation, and in the new feminine movements. In the Italian system the basic elements to be considered are the following:

1) There is a set of unvarying and well-defined tasks (unvarying in the sense that they are alike and obligatory in all families; well-defined in the sense that there exists a basic agreement on their definition) assigned to the family. Schematically, these are (a) tasks related to the survival or well-being of the family's members, especially dependent children; (b) tasks associated with the purchase or maintenance of the goods owned and used by the family: consumption and related activities; (c) tasks we shall call bureaucratic, which derive from the fact that the family is a legal and administrative unit: these include paying taxes, enrolling the children in school, arranging for vaccinations and medical checkups, etc.

Rules, some of them legal but most cultural, determine these tasks; the essential point is that no family functioning as such can ultimately and systematically avoid the obligation of carrying out these tasks.

2) All the elements that can be specifically used to develop the different functions attributed to the family are the resources which families have at their disposal. These are the presence and the personal capacities of the mother and father or other relatives who may be responsible; purchased goods and services, ranging from lodging to electric household appliances, cooked food, and babysitters; services furnished by the state, such as medical services, public assistance, or schooling. A basic distinction between private and public services should be drawn along the following lines that describe the resources needed to manage a family:

a) The resources of the family unit itself; in Italy, like almost everywhere else, the nuclear family is the model, and consequently, the adult members are only the father and mother; the father provides for the family's needs with his earnings; the mother is mainly responsible for managing the family's resources to enable it to accomplish its tasks.

b) Resources external to the family, obtainable on the private market. Many of the functions which in the past were assumed by the family (production of goods, recreational functions, services, even the socialization of the children) have now been taken over by outside hands in today's society; these relate to the supply of readymade clothing, frozen foods, private schools, holiday lodgings, maid service, or babysitting service.

c) Resources external to the family but distributed by a public service at low price or for nothing. In the light of the discrepancy that exists between needs and accessibility of services on the private market, certain goods and services considered essential have been provided and taken over more and more by the state and by public enterprises. One distinctive feature of the Italian situation is that the public services for social assistance do not derive from the rights of a citizen who finds himself in need as such, but from specific situations requiring such assistance. Although the number of persons covered by such assistance has increased over recent years, there still remains a part of the population not covered by public assistance for a number of basic needs. (9)

Stratification: Three Conditions of Family Life

Family management entails a relationship between the group of tasks it must perform and the availability of public and private resources. Access to resources is determined, as we have seen, by the disposable income and by the family's situation with respect to the system of public assistance. Families differ, and fall into different strata, on the basis of these two criteria.

Families with high incomes can "hire" another adult to perform some of the household tasks and in this way can introduce a modification into the basic model in which the parents themselves are the only ones available for running the family; these families can turn to the private market for a number of goods and services, residence in better neighborhoods, summer houses, nurses for the children, medical care in private clinics, in some cases in Switzerland or the United States, and instruc-

tion in private schools or even abroad. Families with easy access to these privileged services, i.e., which have an adequate income for them, are in a small minority; they include families of the leisured bourgeoisie, certain categories of top-level staff in industry, some public officials, and members of the liberal professions. Since our interest in the present case is restricted to giving merely a rough estimate of this group, we should say that not more than 5% of the total number of families are in this category.

b) At the opposite extreme are those families whose income is barely sufficient to cover elementary needs of survival, even though the effective channels for gaining access to the system of public assistance do not ensure their protection; many farm workers, construction workers, domestics, and persons working at home, i.e., precisely those categories with low and irregular incomes, are at least partly excluded or in any case discriminated against in the use of public services. In these families needs which are just as important as having a roof over one's head, eating, being adequately clad, cannot be met; these include needs bearing on medical assistance, specialized assistance (for the handicapped, the aged, and invalids), recreational and sport facilities, and schooling. (10)

c) The great majority of families fall into an intermediate stratum characterized by, on the one hand, income sufficient not only for essential needs but also for access to the private market for certain services adjudged indispensable, and on the other hand, by general access to public services. This layer of families, for whom the job status of the head of the family and hence income vary over a wide range, includes: most salaried workers on various levels, highly skilled workers, small and middle-level shopkeepers and entrepreneurs, and certain categories of liberal professions. The one feature which distinguishes them from the upper layer is that they cannot always and for all needs turn to the private market. On the other hand, unlike families in the lower stratum, they do have guaranteed access to public services and can even turn to the private market to meet at least some of their needs. The

particular possible combinations between public resources, private resources outside the family, and family resources are obviously innumerable; their common feature is the possibility of finding an adequate level for running the family.

Of the three situations roughly described in the foregoing, we shall limit our analysis to families in the middle layer. Indeed, not only is this the layer which makes up the great majority of families, it is also the one which, as regards the woman's situation, displays the most significant variables for explaining what was brought to light in the preceding discussion, namely, the absence or, better, the presence under quite specific conditions, of women on the labor market.

The Woman's Situation in Family Life

To describe the woman's situation in the family of the middle strata as defined above, we are obliged to analyze one other basic aspect of family structure: the role of the husband and head of the family in the rigid role of worker.

The traits describing male and female family roles in industrial society have been analyzed by Talcott Parsons in terms which, in their broad features, are applicable to the family type we are dealing with here. In the specific Italian situation that interests us, i.e., the situation existing in urban industrial areas during the 1960s, the work role of the head of the family had the following features:

Workday of eight hours (or more at those frequent times when he is obliged to work overtime); one, two, or even three or four hours' travel time between home and job. The head of the family is thus absent from the home for a minimum of 9 hours and a maximum of 14 hours, if not more;

Limited holiday time; average of 10-15 days, or for a minority, up to one month. In any event, this period constitutes only a small fraction of the summer school vacation time of the children (which is more than three months);

Working conditions (including home-job travel time) that are very fatiguing both physically and mentally.

The result of all this is that the man identifies principally with the world of his job, in a manner that is often passive and conflict ridden, but in any case with poor participation in family life. All the types one might find — the worker who accepts overtime to increase his wages, the type who sits down in front of the television after work, or the militant engaged in union or political activity — are equally marginal or excluded from any roles having to do with running the family. The consequence is that the role of managing family tasks falls entirely on the mother, and this role in its turn is also rigid.

The Role of the Woman in the Household

The tasks associated with taking care of the children are well known. To carry them out the Italian woman of today has very limited help. For most paid help is beyond their means, the number of nurseries is totally inadequate, less than half of the children are accepted in nursery schools, primary school is only four hours a day (morning or afternoon), and the organizations, public or private, recreational or cultural, for children and adolescents are very few. The Italian mother must therefore watch over, organize, and assist her children for a period extending beyond the preschool and primary-school period (in contrast to what could be the case if the educational system and the organization of leisure time were different).

A second set of tasks is associated with housework. In the families belonging to our intermediate stratum, the use of electric household appliances, frozen foods, etc., has expanded in recent years but is still relatively limited by economic and cultural factors as compared with other countries. (11)

At the same time, we find that the bureaucratic tasks of the family are increasing; the wife of the worker, the salaried employee, the salesman, and the professional has a large number of relatively new tasks (or rather, it is the way they are carried out which is new: they have become bureaucratic). For example, she must pay the gas and electricity bills, the rent, the social insurance for the maid, and the traffic fines; she

must keep a look out for sales at different times during the year; she must think about bank loans; keep note of when installment loans fall due; and she must meet other schedules, medical checkups for the children, school, etc.

It is the rigid schedules and formal procedures associated with all her tasks that give them their particular features. Yet it must be emphasized that under such conditions, the full-time presence of someone in the family is indispensable; and this person is always the wife.

In this sense the "professionalization" of the woman's role in the family grows in measure as the working conditions of the head of the family become more inflexible and the resources available for running the family decrease. From this standpoint we shall show that the specialized role of housewife displays some exceptionally rigid features in Italy in comparison with other countries. Indeed, while inflexibility of the work role of the head of the family is a feature common to Western advanced capitalist countries and industrial societies based on the Soviet model, the availability of resources varies. In Eastern Europe and the USSR (in which the female participation rate is very high), public services are quite developed, and everyone has access to them. In capitalist societies such as the United States and England, to take two examples, the role of the woman in middle-class families is certainly highly specialized, but there are some fundamental differences from the Italian situation; first, a growing number of these women resume working after an interruption in which they were engaged full time in household work; second, the general living conditions and family services for the middle-class and upper working-class families are unequivocally better than in Italy. For this reason the specialization and inflexibility of the woman's role entails lower costs.

We have analyzed a number of points concerning the conditions of women in suburban life (i.e., women from the intermediate layer, or the middle-class and upper working class), which is obviously rigid and specialized, entails considerable costs for the woman herself and for the other members of the

family (we stress in particular, the difficult methods of socialization of children), but is unquestionably less grave than the Italian situation, in which the lack of public services and the miserable conditions of urban life weigh heavily on all families regardless of their social situation.

Let us then sum up briefly the principal result of our analysis so far: given similar conditions, the fact that wives with children are for the most part absent from the labor market (or if they do have a job, it is part time, seasonal, work at home, short time, or marginal) is a structural fact, i.e., it is independent of individual choice and as such is permanent and universal.

III. Participation of Women in Politics and Union Activities

The most important facts relevant to political and union participation are as follows:

Initially, from the end of the war to the 1950s, the participation of women, especially working-class women, in mass organizations attached to the parties on the left was considerable. The most important women's organization was the Union of Italian Women, constituted in 1950 with a structure parallel to the Communist Party; the UIW had organized about 1 million women by 1950 and mobilized them with equal facility on issues specific to women (protection of the female worker, assistance facilities) and for general political purposes (campaigns for peace). In addition, female participation in unions and union struggles was quite considerable and quite militant for certain categories of workers and for certain regions of the country. (12)

Between the mid-fifties and the end of the 1960s, the existing organizations and the union struggles went through a considerable waning period (as regards participation this affected all levels and all job categories). The UIW — to take a specific example — encountered greater and greater resistance to its recruitment campaigns, and at the beginning of the 1960s its membership was about 200,000.

Since the early 1970s there has been a perceptible increase in female participation in the struggle for specifically feminine interests, as well as for more general objectives linked to the society in which they are living.

We have in mind some very recent trends and phenomena, knowledge of which is at present insufficient, or in any event limited to very narrow circles of opinion. Meanwhile, we feel it is important to stress that since the movements of 1966-69 and the recent workers' and students' struggles, it has been necessary to come up with some different definitions and new indicators to analyze the question of participation.

In particular, the forms in which female interests are expressed, i.e., in Italy the feminist positions imported from abroad but given an original thrust, and the grassroots movements in which women participate actively, for lodging, for public services, and for schools, must be studied as phenomena that are profoundly different from the participation of the forties and fifties. They are different because of their strong components of collective behavior, and different because of the segment of the population that is involved, specifically in the majority, women of the middle class and upper strata of the working class (i.e., our intermediate strata).

In the light of these considerations, statistical analysis of the past is of little importance, whereas any attempt to understand future trends, bearing not only on the question of women but on the general situation of Italian society, cannot afford to overlook these new factors, even though they are just barely emerging.

IV. Conclusion

Our analysis has shown significant links between different aspects of the overall social system. In a capitalist society incapable of reforms, such as Italian society was during the fifties and sixties, a growing number of tasks have been transferred to the family: indeed, one of the direct effects of the process of growth itself has been a steady rise in the standards

applied to the satisfaction of needs among a growing number of individuals and families. But this situation differs from that in other countries, in which economic growth has been accompanied by a policy of public intervention (summed up in the term "welfare state"). The Italian public system not only has failed to adapt to the new needs, it has become, in a relative sense, even more insufficient and inadequate. More specifically, in keeping with our topic, the situation of woman has been marked by the following features: (a) her full-time presence in the family as organizer of resources has become necessary, and consequently, her presence on the labor market has been subordinated to this more basic need; (b) as a consequence of the reduction of the number of women holding down jobs and participating in union organizations, and of the growing privatization of their sphere of action, women have been and are excluded from any form of participation in public life.

In conclusion, and as a signpost for a later study, let us stress that the balance achieved in the 1960s between family structure, female job structure, and private values cannot remain the same in the future. Appeals for a radical change are being heard, in part as the contradictory effect of the very conditions of the 1960s and in part as the result of external factors related to the general functioning of the Italian economic and political system. More specifically, there are a certain number of changes that merit emphasis.

One of these, of fundamental importance, is the spread of contraceptive devices in Italy (later than in other Western capitalist countries, but auguring a rapid increase in the immediate future), making it possible for the first time for women to plan their lives (number of children and especially timing). This element of change will certainly have a direct influence on the specific ways in which female labor is offered on the labor market and, moreover, is sure to have some very profound implications for customs and values.

Various other elements, such as increased formal education for women, an attitude in favor of permanent jobs for women (many of them having experienced stable employment when they

were young), the demands of labor unions and organizations such as the UIW that oppose work at home and part-time work, also enter into the picture. These elements will influence the conditions of inflexibility: women will no longer, as in the past, be disposed to accept marginal jobs.

The foreseeable development of such industrial sectors as electronics, chemistry, and wholesale distribution, which will hire female labor, will have a considerable influence on these changes.

In family life the specific element that has become more and more prominent since 1970 has been the increase in the cost of living. Consequently, the exploitation of private resources and the rigidity of the woman's role in the home are becoming more and more untenable.

Finally, two other elements should be mentioned with regard to women as a general subject of interest and as a political issue. The first is that women now participate in organizations, whether the new ones such as the feminist groups, or the traditional ones, such as the UIW, in a fundamentally different manner. It is very important to analyze what relations could feasibly be established between the feminist movement and such political forces as the parties, the unions, the UIW, etc. Secondly, in Italy the conditions of family life are objectively so miserable for the vast majority of women (defined as the intermediate stratum in the urban areas of the North) that they cause new tensions and new forms of participation: urban struggles, struggles for services, struggles for schools.

These are the indications. We shall limit ourselves for the present to the observation that this set of new factors seems to indicate that the contradictions inherent in women's conditions can no longer be dealt with as they were in the sixties. One can then envision two alternatives: either a new system of equilibrium will emerge, which will bring the situation of Italian capitalism more into line with that existing in other advanced capitalist countries by means of a series of reforms in the basic sectors; or new innovative and conflict-ridden behavior will be generated by the particularly backward conditions exist-

ing in Italy. These modes of behaviors will be the result of a new awareness on the part of women, but also a new awareness which is more general.

In this sense a study of Italian conditions such as we have proposed in the present article would help to delineate not a backward situation but a particular path of capitalist development during which a number of original solutions to the contradictions inherent in the feminine condition could emerge.

Notes

1) The analysis presented in this article is based on national statistics and on the initial findings of a sociological study carried out in an industrial area in Northern Italy; see L. Balbo, "Le condizioni strutturali della vita familiare," and M. P. May, "Mercato del lavoro femminile: espulsione o occupazione nascosta?" Inchiesta, 1973, No. 9, pp. 10-37.

2) Unless indicated to the contrary, these data have been taken from I.S.T.A.T., Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1972, Rome, in the case of Italy, and from B.I.T., Annuaire des statistiques du travail 1972, for the other countries.

3) The figures for employment by age have been taken from a publication of the O.C.D.E. for the year 1965 (O.C.D.E., l'Évolution démographique de 1965 à 1980 en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord, Paris, 1966). This choice has been dictated by the fact that whereas this study examines age groups spanning five-year periods, other more recent international publications unfortunately use age groups that are too broad to permit an exact analysis of the successive exit and entry of women from and into the labor market (for example, the B.I.T. yearbooks put all women between the ages of 30 and 49 into a single group).

4) Central Statistical Office, Social Trends, 1970, No. 1. The data on other countries confirm this fact; in 1968, 32% of American women married before the age of 19; for Germany and France this figure was 25% and 21%, respectively (UN, Annuaire démographique, 1970, New York, 1971).

5) I.S.T.A.T. Annuario di statistiche demografiche 1968, Rome, 1971.

6) The most important of the recent essays on the labor market debate have been collected in P. Leon and M. Marocchi, Sviluppo economico italiano e forza-lavoro, Padua and Marseille, 1973.

7) The exact meaning of the term marginal labor as it is used in the literature has yet to be defined and described in all its concrete manifestations. A first attempt has been made by Dean Morse for the United States; he defines marginal or peripheral labor as a category of residues, as opposed to stable and full-time employment. According to Morse, the peripheral work force constitutes an extremely heterogeneous category, the definition of which turns on the fact that "this group is unified solely by the fact that for one reason or another its members do not choose or are forced not to choose full-time employment" [retranslated from the French] (D. Morse, The Peripheral Worker, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 46).

8) The data on work at home have been taken from a study done in 1972 in Lombardy and published in L. Frey, I problemi del lavoro a domicilio in Lombardia, Milan, July 10, 1972.

9) A recent study estimates that 85% of the Italian population is covered by some form of social insurance: see A. Ceci and R. Proietti, "Il carico familiare nella programmazione economica regionale," Rivista italiana di economia demografica e statistica, 1968, No. 1-4.

10) A classification quite similar to the one adopted here to distinguish the intermediate layer is that of the United States Bureau of Labor, which distinguishes an "inadequate" from a "modest but adequate" level for taking care of family needs. For a complete analysis of the problems involved in defining and measuring family needs, see Margaret Wynn, Family Policy, New York, Penguin Books, 1972.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 26.

12) The number of women enrolled in the PCI during this period was about a half million; the data on female participation

in unions are defective. The principal sources for information on political participation from 1945 through 1965 are contained in a series of volumes entitled Ricerche sulla partecipazione politica in Italia, Bologne, il Mulino, 1967-69.