

DOMESTIC LABOUR AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN ITALY SINCE THE 1970s

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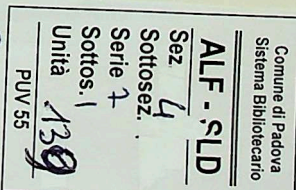
Abstract After a brief mention of the themes prevalent in the feminist movement in various countries, the article focuses on some questions which, starting with the centrality of housework in the feminist debate of the 1970s, formed a *leitmotif* of that period and the early 1980s: above all, the relationship between, on the one hand, the rejection of work as a political practice theorised, particularly in Italy in the 1970s, as a fundamental instrument of struggle and, on the other, women's availability/unavailability for work. Remaining within an approach which places the stress on women's behaviour, this issue is also analysed in the socio-political context of the early 1980s. Some fundamental moments are identified along the itinerary undertaken by women towards building an identity increasingly independent of a way-of-being functional to the unpaid reproduction of others: not only the rejection of marriage and procreation, but also, under some aspects, the great struggles centering on abortion, lesbianism and prostitution. But if, in this way, women have distanced themselves from a sacrificial role and if, as is happening increasingly with the so-called 'technological revolution', the possibilities of reproduction at the mass level are becoming further restricted, what will become of human reproduction? What, the author wonders as a provocation, will become of love?

Internationally, in both the advanced capitalist countries and elsewhere, the theme of *work* has invariably become a central focus for feminist discussion and women's movements, highlighting the inequity common to the most diverse economic and socio-political systems: the woman is not only expected to do the housework for which no payment is provided, but also simply to add it to other work whether she is employed in industry, the service sector, or cultivating the land and has a market stall to sell the produce and other sundry goods, as often happens in the so-called Third World.

Obviously, the other emerging theme of great importance, *female sexuality*, which is so closely intertwined with the topic of the *body*, has undergone a fundamental level of redefinition within the theme of work. In fact, the interpretation of the organisation of labour and, above all, domestic labour, has made it possible to strip the veils off a female sexuality imposed in terms of family and social productivity – in other words, a sexuality essentially reproductive of others, rather than of oneself and one's desire. By the same token, the negation of the woman's body by turning it into a machine for procreation is denounced.

Starting from the analysis of labour, the demand for a 'wage for housework', whoever – man or woman – in fact supplies it, has defined an organisational sector and a very lively area of debate, in Italy, other European countries and North America. Since the early 1970s when the proposal was articulated in all its various implications, the discussion has continued to spread in the most diverse countries, winning support and arousing polemic, but maintaining a central position, not least in the multi-

for equality between men and women typical of the 1980s



The feminist impulse has been expressed in various ways in different countries. Here, we will mention only the psychoanalytic approach, which had great weight in the French experience, and the practice of 'self-awareness' in the Italian experience, which, in certain respects, owed a debt to the 'consciousness raising' of the United States. Speaking of Italy at the national level, and accepting the limits of trying to schematise a turbulent reality such as the feminist movement, two major forms of expression of Italian feminism have been the 'wages-for-housework' and the 'self-awareness' sectors.

But the Italy of the 1970s represented a very specific terrain for the struggles which had spread from the major factories to the universities, the schools and to the wider social context. In those years, the extra-institutional political debate developed some significant breaks with traditional Marxism. Examples were the rejection of work as against the ideology of work, and the end of the assumption that the public ownership of the means of production is the dividing line between capitalism and socialism. The state, understood as the complex articulation of capitalist strategy, emerged as the privileged target for the demands which the various movements were pursuing. In this context, the Italian feminist movement was characterised, with more emphasis than in other countries, by the *leitmotif* of 'work/rejection of work': above all, as a discovery and denunciation of femininity as labour (domestic, reproductive labour), but at the same time demanding to shift its cost to the state, reduce the work-time involved, and break down the fundamental organisational cell within which the supply of this form of labour was primarily commanded, i.e. the family.

This was a novelty and a big break both with the Catholic tradition, which imposed housework¹ on the woman as a sacrifice and mission, and with the Communist tradition, which ignored housework or stigmatised it as an expression of backwardness, urging the woman to find an outside job, if possible in a factory, as the path to emancipation, which was thus represented as the sole legitimate form of liberation.

The great workers' and students' struggles of the late 1960s laid the ground from which the feminist movement emerged in the 1970s. Protagonists from the beginning, and centres of aggregation with other women in the formation of the feminist groups, were precisely those women who had experienced their own lack of representation as political subjects in the student and workers' movement and in their activism in the extra-parliamentary groups.

At the factories, the pickets chanted, 'More wages, fewer hours!', but on the domestic front of the unwaged working women of the home, the starting-point had to be, 'Money of our own, and no more than eight hours!'

If the students demanded a 'pre-wage' during their studies, the ten million housewives who had no wage at all could hardly be ignored. 'Free transport, free meals!', the chants demanded, so what should be said of the kindergartens, which had always been demanded, but rarely conceded, and then only to let the woman take on a second, outside job, never to reduce the working

hours of her first job? In this way, the terrain of struggle became a mine-field in which there was an increasing explosion of new contradictions.

While the debate on productive/unproductive labour flared around the factories and offices, the family was identified as the other factory, the locus for the production and reproduction of labour power within which the woman was exploited and not just oppressed as the prevalent literature claimed, caged in a form of labour – housework – with an unlimited working-day, no wage, no vacation, no pension and no social assistance.

The productiveness of housework was debated and reiterated, even if a different conclusion would have implied no difference in feminist demands. It was an obligatory theme of the times, which raised fewer passions in the feminist than in the male world. Productive or not, the women stayed firm by their determination to free themselves of an unpaid job as such, and a job which also supplied an obligatory channel for their own social identity. With the feminist movement, there was an outburst of the women's determination to end the idea that you are all the more woman, and therefore all the more accepted as woman, the more the women are available for the reproduction of others. I think one of the best definitions of a woman to emerge in those years was: 'A woman is she who assumes she must interrupt whatever she is doing if there is some necessity involving the family'.

So, in identifying the family as the other pole of production, the very questionable 'convenience' of exchanging your labour within the family against 'maintenance', or quota of maintenance, showed all its intolerable poverty. This was at a time when the higher levels of education, socialisation and politicisation reached in the processes of struggle generated an unpostponable need for women to redefine themselves as social individuals, rather than as mere appendages to family structures which were functional to plans for economic development or to moments of economic crisis. Thus, to redefine themselves as social individuals presupposed, above all, redefining themselves in their own sexual identity, and this meant a struggle against the family as the locus where there is an obligatory distortion of women's sexuality as a function of procreative and reproductive work. There was thus the need to open up a struggle on the woman's material conditions, for the conquest of elementary rights and against her condition as a subordinate citizen. Fundamentally, though, the struggle was for the woman's right to determine her own identity and life-project – and, above all, the right to change it.

In the social struggles of the late 1960s and very early 1970s, the commitment of the women defending the working-class wage (struggles against the high cost-of-living, high utility tariffs for housing, transport, etc.) reached a threshold. They were, however, still struggles in defence of a family structure, rather than being addressed to winning back and redefining one's own individuality, space and levels of wealth.

It was precisely the state's response to the political struggles of the late 1960s around the wage and their ramifications in society – i.e. the restructuring of

production, decentralisation, destabilisation of the market, galloping inflation, growing unemployment (especially among men) – in brief, the crisis management of the 1970s – which brought about far-reaching modifications in the family's structure and function.

Above all, the heavy attack on the stability of men's jobs and wages undermined a family pattern in which, both among proletarians and the middle classes, financial security was guaranteed primarily by the man. Thus cracks opened in the deeply rooted hierarchy which had characterised the Italian family until then, with the man as bread-winner and the woman as housewife – even though we by no means wish to ignore the contribution of women's extra-domestic work, often supplied illegally or part-time, to the family income. Given this family pattern, which was typical until the start of the 1970s, the lowering of the birth-rate which, as in many other industrialised countries, underwent a particularly sharp acceleration from 1964 on, should still be seen (in our view) as a decision² by the woman to ensure her children a higher standard of living and, hence, as a function of an improved equilibrium in the family³. It was not a demand for personal identity freed of the obligation to motherhood and the role of wife, as it became the case in the 1970s. 'Women, let's give birth to ideas, not just children' was one of the slogans which marked the change in attitude most significantly.

The 1970s, in fact, were not just the years in which the rejection of maternity was the direct expression of the feminists' chosen course. They were also the years in which the rejection of marriage was a refusal to subscribe to the family as a form of life. So, as regards the rejection of work, we can say that prior to the 1970s the reduction of the number of children was functional to working less, but always within the horizon of the family as the general order of life. Afterwards the further lowering of the birth-rate, or the rejection of procreation *tout court*, formed part of a rejection of the family as such, of an itinerary whose focus was feminist autonomy.

After 1972 the reorganisation of production led, on the one hand, to extensive technological innovation in the factories and the progressive dismantling of certain job structures in the old industrial centres but, on the other hand, there was a new geographical dispersion of production. It was this so-called decentralisation of production which led to more diffuse possibilities of work and, hence, wages – often 'black' (illegal) – for new strata of young men and women, but also old people. On the women's front, then, there was a convergence between the objective situation of doing without the support and guarantee of a man's wage, on the one hand, and, on the other, the women's subjectively determined course in which there was an increasingly drastic rejection of the unpaid labour of reproduction, of the family itself in so far as it prescribes this way of life and, with it, the subordination of the woman's life-project to family responsibilities. Rather, the course chosen by women led them, above all, to win their own income for the journey towards constructing their own life-project. In this sense the new labour market, which was interested in more flexible and mobile labour power, provided greater job openings.

From 1972-79 declared women's employment grew by 1,415,000 jobs (ISTAT 1973, 1980)⁴. A very large part entered the service sector and a good part industry; at Fiat alone, 15,000 women were hired between 1978-80. Elsewhere, a very large number of women were hired as undeclared 'black' labour.

On the crest of the wave of the feminist movement's great battles, which now found a mass dimension, particularly in 1974-76, various legislative measures were launched covering abortion, divorce, family consultancy centres, reform of family law, and equality at work. These were designed to liberate women's labour power from some of the constraints and limitations which were now anachronistic in relation to the use which capital intended to make of it. It was at this point that the family's very pattern became, in fact, more equal: a pattern in which, with both him and her holding precarious jobs, or with the stability of her job paralleled by the precariousness of his, everyone – including children and old people – made their contribution to the family income. This was a family, it was argued, which was the locus for regulating the supply of labour power and the composition of family income, but whose hierarchy was certainly less biased in favour of the man, even though the woman's responsibility for reproductive work maintained its primacy.

There was a lengthy debate and much investigation into the relationship between this new family and the new labour market. In almost all the academic research 'from the women's side', the stress was on its functionality in terms of the new labour market, and there were also intensive investigations into outside work by women, which underscored its subordination to compatibility with work in the home. Others stressed a revival to the 'yen for work', pointing out how this availability for waged labour, which returned to an ever increasing level after the 'great refusal' of the late 1960s, allowed family units to maintain a high standard of living in the 1970s.

In our view, however, this interpretation grasps only one aspect of the overall picture in those years. In fact, if both men and women were undeniably available for labour which produces goods and services, this is not so true of the labour which produces and reproduces labour power, for which women continued to express an increasingly marked rejection.

In so far as the demand voiced by the feminist movement from the beginning, to have this labour paid, had run up against substantial inertia on the state's part⁵ to the point that – in the second half of the 1970s – there was a further reduction in the state budget for finance and services most closely related to the reproduction of labour power, increasingly extended strata of women expressed their unavailability for the labour of reproducing others. Instead they voiced their determination to win, above all, a guarantee for their own life through their own waged labour.

At the time, when women occupied buildings so they could be turned into kindergartens or simply took their children to work, to mention just two of the best-known examples, and where these actions generated sporadic and fleeting responses from local administrations or individual employers, there

was no significant government move to accept at least the raising of children, if not the thousand tasks of housework, as paid working-time. At the same time, there was not just a growing number of employed women, but also a growing number of women offering their labour power. In other words, an increasing number of women declared themselves unemployed or in search of their first job. Just as significantly, and unlike in the past, working mothers did not leave their jobs when they had children, so there was not the usual withdrawal from the labour market between the ages of 25 and 35⁶. Rather, they used absenteeism which in the 1970s rose to levels among women which were about double the already high levels for men.

But there would be something mysterious in this extension of both the employment and the supply of women's labour power if, assuming – as we have always assumed – that the normal housework involved in running a family totals far more than eight hours, we were to argue simply that an increasing number of women managed to double it up with another job. However much outside work might induce further 'rationalisation' of housework, or a new wage might make it possible to buy new household appliances, however much feminism might induce further sharing of housework chores and more equal forms of cooperation within the family (in so far as this was compatible with the man's type of job), if the volume of housework supplied is for the reproduction of a typical family (mother, father and one or two children), it cannot be reduced below a certain threshold.

Thus two types of consideration arise in explaining the extension of women's work outside the home:

(a) if a woman has a family of the above-mentioned type and regular outside work, a good part at least of the housework is done either by relations (usually, his or her mother) or by a third woman, a coloured or white domestic help, and a good part of the woman's wage goes towards paying her. In fact, after a fall in paid domestic labour in the early 1970s, it showed a clear rise again subsequently. Families reported as using domestic helps rose from 630,000 in 1974 to 1,030,000 in 1977, though a very large proportion of the helps preferred not to be declared. Above all, they find it more convenient to 'moonlight' since they can continue enjoying the husband's health insurance, something which their job gives them no right to, and the husband can continue to draw the family cheque he receives for the maintenance of the wife⁷.

(b) taking the question at a higher level, an increasing number of women reject creating a family, procreating, and taking the responsibility of reproducing men.

In our view, in political terms, this is the more significant form of behaviour. This means highlighting an always neglected aspect of the relationship between family and the labour market: namely, that for increasingly broad strata of women the new readiness for outside work presupposed a decision not to have children, marry, or cohabit with men, precisely so as to avoid being forced to use one wage for two jobs (her own and the domestic help's) and

restrict the sphere of outside work to that compatible with having children or a man in the house. Or else, in the hypothetical case of a husband with a high enough wage to pay domestic help without touching the wife's wage, the refusal to form a family with him was often due to a rejection of the network of mediations and complicities through social status which would very probably have annulled her political identity. In any case, it should be stressed that, while a constellation of values traceable to a moment of struggle and the exercise of power with respect to the state, can always be found in the rejection of maternity, the same is not true of the 'rediscovery of maternity' over which rivers of post-feminist ink have been consumed. The basic mistake in this latter approach is that, since the conditions for maternity have deteriorated increasingly at the proletarian level, and not only in Italy, the choice of maternity has in fact become a 'luxury'. Those authors who exalt maternity with first-person testimony often, in fact, perjure themselves since they above all omit to mention the comfortable level of income enjoyed by themselves or their husbands, and the exceptional elasticity in terms of time of some of the privileged jobs on which their testimony is based.

As we have noted, in the 1970s there was a further fall in the birth-rate, together with a rise in the number of illegitimate births. Unlike the previous period, however, this time the resulting itinerary was an expression of feminist autonomy, of the women's refusal to be defined through reproduction in order to find self-definition through a diversification of their life choices.

The rejection of procreation by these women went hand-in-hand with the rejection of marriage (and an increase in the number of legal separation cases) which demographers, too, consider the most dynamic factor in the decade. Forms of more casual cohabitation, which were fundamentally out of step with the structure of sentimental relationships, less well-defined forms of aggregation and relationship, women living alone (with children or with other women) became such widespread forms of behaviour that even scholars in the Catholic area noted them, together with the atypical and diversified forms which the family can take, among them, the family's non-legalisation. They even reached the point of describing, as families, reproductive situations and forms which no longer had anything to do with the traditional family. Alongside single people, they talked about 'family communes'.

The family, or cohabitation with a man, was rejected because within this relationship it is very difficult to free oneself of a woman's responsibilities, which have been patterned as roles too long, not only in the material tasks of housework, but also those involved in the psychological, affective and other aspects of reproduction.

Thus, for the woman in the 1970s, reproduction became the primary terrain of struggle, where achieving certain levels of rejection made it possible to store up strength for other things, to take different options as regards outside work, to build moments of bargaining and aggregation by force, and to find a different self-definition other than through men's demands and family responsibilities. Significantly, even among women who decided to have

children, this choice was frequently postponed with respect to the 'convenience of the family' characterising earlier decades. You have a child at the age of 35 or 40 because, earlier, you were pursuing, and had often changed, a project; you tried to build a financial autonomy which would tend to last.

In this connection, even though the wealth of the debate which arose must be condensed to essentials, it is once more worthwhile stressing the extent to which the great struggles on abortion, lesbianism and, even though not so obviously, prostitution, fall within the same trend of a rejection of the unpaid work of reproduction.

(a) The struggle for the legalisation of abortion was in fact a question of stopping paying, not only in money, but also in deaths, physical injury and prison, the most drastic rejection of housework. There is in fact no doubt that the quantitative and qualitative leap in supplying this form of labour comes when children are born. So, together with the woman's self-determination as regards the choice of maternity, which was no longer accepted as a necessary passage towards self-identification nor as the necessary or casual consequence of sexual experience, stress was laid on self-determination in the explicit possibility of rejecting the quantity of housework which each extra child represents.

(b) As for lesbianism, in the 1970s it was a practice which achieved the strength of an open political demand. Here, too, the demand was all the more urgent, not only as the right to self-determination in one's sexual choices, but also as an experience in lowering the level of the labour of reproduction in so far as this was supplied within the structure of relationships which tended to greater equality. Having a relationship with a woman rather than a man in fact required spending less energy on finding agreement over the division of housework, since the division did not find expression through sexual roles. We can add that, since the feminist movement's construction of political work, struggles and debates were developing almost exclusively among women, there was a greater preference to expend the labour of reproduction on a woman than on a man, since it was more consistent with the type of sociality being experienced, and more 'productive' – if that is the right word – in political terms.

Here, in any case, the problem was not so much one of winning legalisation, as neutralising criminalisation by the state through blackmail at work and denial of the right to keep the children in legal separation cases.

(c) In the case of prostitution, too, the problem was not legalisation, but, as in other countries, opposition to prostitution's criminalisation: to neutralise criminalisation and achieve the repeal of those legislative measures which, though they did not strike at prostitution directly, supported its criminalisation indirectly. Prostitution, in any case, remained a strongly criminalised activity precisely because it is a rejection of the essential terms of matrimonial exchange – unlimited labour or reproduction in exchange for maintenance – in favour of exchanging money against given sexual tasks. The fact that sex, the central task of domestic labour, is freed from the mystification of the marriage

'love-pact' (the labour of love) (Dalla Costa 1978; Fortunati 1981) and achieves a direct exchange against money rather than just 'maintenance', has always attracted the highest levels of criminalisation and the greatest need to isolate the women in question. Here, then, the struggle in the 1970s was extremely difficult, but it had the merit of creating a general commitment over an issue which had been largely ignored in the debate on the class struggle. It made it possible to clear the ground for the subsequent planting of a series of explicit demands.

In Italy, a Prostitute's Committee was set up at Pordenone, not far from Venice, in 1982. The prostitutes have their own newspaper and their own Charter of Rights, and they have broken out of their ghetto through numerous debates in various forums. Above all, working as a prostitute also provided a more or less precarious source of income, added to other wages or in the absence of other wages, for an increasingly large number and increasingly differentiated strata of women during the 1970s. In 1980, it was estimated that at least 1 million Italian women were working as prostitutes⁸, but the figure was said to be a significant underestimate, and it was recognised that an increasing number of women supplied this form of labour to satisfy a trend to increasingly high consumption, rather than for mere survival.

Today we have once more reached a significant moment for women's work and the rejection of it. On the one hand, there is a confirmation of the trend towards rejection of the unpaid labour of reproduction in favour of an increasingly extensive availability for the market in waged labour. At the same time, not only has there been no significant revival of the birth or marriage rate, but the increase in the female workforce between 1977 and 1982 was almost double that among men: a rise of 872,000 for women, compared with 469,000 for men. It is true, however, that only two-thirds of the women's labour power on offer in fact found jobs. Analysing the trend of the women's labour market in the same period, we find that female employment:

- 1) continued to fall in agriculture;
- 2) was stationary in industry, where it was concentrated in small and medium-sized firms with 200-499 employees, among whom 30 per cent was accounted for by women;
- 3) increased in the service sector, where 58 per cent of the total was accounted for by women in 1982.

In 1983, 6,621,000 women held jobs, compared with 6,561,000 (ISTAT 1984, 1983)⁹ in the previous year. At the same time, there was also an increase in the number of women declaring themselves as unemployed or in search of their first job. But a number of heavy limitations weigh on women's employment, which has already shown a slower growth-rate.

The rapid spread of micro-electronics in the 1980s and the resulting transformation of the service sector, which in previous years had been the most significant area of growth for women's employment, may have created new jobs, but has also aroused fears of a reduction in job possibilities. This is not only because 'further rationalisation' would shift a series of tasks to micro-

processors, but also because of the failure to set up training courses for women so that they might fill the new jobs which restructuring creates and, above all, cope with the rapid obsolescence and change of tasks which follows the rapid obsolescence and replacement of the machines being used. At the same time, as in all the technologically more developed countries, there is the plan, even if it is not yet a reality in Italy, to farm out work to women at home with video-terminals. Above all, especially as regards the service sector, the policy of restricting public expenditure should not be neglected since a series of results include a reduction of the number of employees on the government payroll and more generally a fall in employment opportunities, not least through attacks on absenteeism and the suppression of 'baby-pension' rights by which some civil servants may begin drawing a pension at a relatively early age. These are all factors which may place heavy limits on the further development of women's employment and annul the service sector's role of compensating for losses from other sectors of the economy.

So, for the coming years, according to forecasts which seem to rest on a solid foundation, the social framework will be defined by the following coordinates: a further fall in the number of births, increasing pressure from women and old people in the labour market (with the latter under increasing pressure to remain there due to the inflationary erosion of pensions and incomes), the extension of new technologies, the extension of education (but, appropriate for the new processes of production, for whom and for how many?), greater flexibility of labour, and the extension of part-time working. Currently, in Italy, the institutional debate is focussed not so much on labour costs as on employment levels, since it is thought that the system can tolerate neither current levels of unemployment¹⁰ nor the levels of the immediate future in which young people, women, immigrants and returnee emigrants are those who are worst hit. For women this is also because they have more difficulty in finding new jobs, and because trade-union, government and management policies seem to agree in offering them for sacrifice.

There is a debate on reducing the working week (to 35 hours?) in order to create jobs at the same or different wage levels. But the most significant discussion is not on small reductions in the amount of time worked, which would be very problematic if accompanied by wage reductions, but rather on the creation of a totally different organisation of work at the general level. By this is meant a more precarious labour market and lower wages for sectors considered less productive or functions considered less important. These conditions, which are supposed to become generally accepted, are promoted by the much trumpeted need for 'de-regulation'. It is said quite openly that young people, above all, and women must be ready to accept sub-standard wages.

Thus, the 'micro-electronic revolution' brings with it its baggage of mass poverty, reminding us, if there was any need for it, that it, too, is a child of the usual capitalist mode of production, with its old vice of compressing proletarian reproduction by trusting in the 'miracles' worked by women.

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But it is improbable that the miracles will come about. The mass of working men and women, together with the old people, immigrants and returnee emigrants, will be forced into a harsh search for survival in conditions of total insecurity. With the general lowering of working hours and wages, which for most people will further reduce the possibility if not the long-vanished convenience, of procreation, how much willingness will there be left for inter-individual reproduction?

With the down-grading of reproduction, the 'miracle' of domestic labour laid bare, and the lover in eclipse . . . what will be the future of love?

Notes

- ¹ Here, and as always on my part, I take 'housework' in the broad sense of the 'labour of production and reproduction of labour power', not in the vulgarised sociological sense of a collection of material tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing, etc.
- ² We speak of the woman's 'decision', which could, for the most part, be put into effect almost only illegally since, at that time, there was a firm prohibition against contraception and abortion.
- ³ In this connection, we take into account the recent processes of urbanisation and the possibility of finding a job for those who came from the country and the Italian South.
- ⁴ According to ISTAT (1973), 4,881,000 women were employed in 1972, while 1979 figure was 6,296,000 (ISTAT 1980).
- ⁵ I have dealt with this aspect and moments of the feminist struggle in the 1970s elsewhere (1982 : 50-73).
- ⁶ In this connection we should remember the incidence on the choice of a factor discussed below: the postponement of procreation.
- ⁷ As regards the pension, since the legislation on this form of work makes it convenient to work illegally, the women supplying domestic help build up their pension rights through voluntary contributions.
- ⁸ According to what emerged at the Congress, 'Aspetti biologici, sociali e giuridici della prostituzione', organised in Rome in 1980 by the Italian Academy of Moral and Biological Sciences.
- ⁹ Data from ISTAT (1984) show that 14,083,000 men were employed in 1983, compared with 14,116,000 in 1982 (ISTAT 1983).
- ¹⁰ According to ISTAT (1984), there were 2,278,000 unemployed persons in 1983, whereas the unemployment figure for 1984 (ISTAT 1985) was 2,391,000. The latter corresponds to an unemployment rate of 10.4 per cent.

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Biographical Note: Mariarosà Dalla Costa, Professor in Political Sociology at the Political Science Faculty of Padua University, is known for her activity in the area of the feminist movement known as 'Wages for Housework'. Her text *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale* (Padua/Venice: Marsilio, 1972) has been translated into five languages. She is co-author of *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974 and 1977), and *Crisi delle politiche e politiche nella crisi* (Naples: Pirelli, 1981). Her best-known works include *Famiglia, welfare e stato tra Progressismo e New Deal* (Milan: F. Angeli, 1983).

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