

Unravelling the Political Economy of Social Policy Formation: The Spanish Compulsory Maternity Leave, 1900-1936

La economía política de la formación de políticas sociales: el seguro obligatorio de maternidad en España, 1900-1936

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ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Maternity leave developed as part of the health insurance systems during the formation of most European welfare states, emerging as the first work-family policy. Although its expansion benefited from an ideological enhancement of maternity's societal role, cross-country differences arose depending on distributive conflicts between social groups. Nevertheless, the political economy of such a policy has not been fully explored yet. This paper focuses on the Spanish case. Implemented in 1931 after more than thirty years of debates, compulsory maternity leave became the second compulsory social insurance in Spain. Throughout this process, controversies between interest groups and ideological factions were determinant in shaping and delaying the scheme's development. Moreover, those debates took place under sharp regime changes that significantly shaped social groups' bargaining capacity.

The study analyses the debates between those groups during the first third of the twentieth century by focusing on three policy debates—the Barcelona Conference about health insurance project (1922), the INP's public information on compulsory maternity leave Draft Bill (1927), and the conflicts and controversies following its implementation (1931-1936). The paper combines a number of primary sources generated by these events—such as INP's reports, party press, or historical statistics—to systematically establish policy preferences of the labour movement, Catholics (including Catholic trade unions), employers, doctors, and women's organisations throughout the period. In particular, it builds on previous qualitative explorations of public information (1927) to quantify social groups' claims on the scheme's generosity, coverage, and funding, coding them and building a dataset of policy preferences.

By doing so, it finds evidence of the different models in place, as well as significant intra-group cleavages based on ideology, class composition and sectorial and regional variance. For instance, funding the scheme through worker contributions created divisions within the labour movement, particularly between Catholics and the rest. A similar cleavage can be found with business owners, as employers' organisations from capital-intensive regions and lower industrial female labour force participation were more supportive than those dominated by labour-intensive, highly feminised companies. Women's movements also exhibited policy cleavages based on ideological divisions, lacking a unified maternity leave proposal. Finally, while doctors supported generous compensation with significant coverage, their opposition to state regulation regarding health services severely hindered the scheme's implementation. Finally, although the paper does its best to establish cross-group differences systematically and also provides strong evidence for intergroup ideological cleavages throughout the period, much more research is needed to fully explore policy cleavages based on regional and sectorial origin.