Gianfranco Cresciani Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia 1922-1945 Although Italians had migrated to Australia since the middle of the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1920s that they became aware that they were a community in a foreign land, not just isolated individuals in search of fortune. Their political, cultural, economic and recreational associations became an important factor.

Many of them, although settled in Australia, still thought of themselves as an appendage of Italy, a belief strengthened by Fascism's nationalist propaganda which urged them to reject alien cultures, customs and traditions. The xenophobic hostility shown by some Australians greatly contributed to the success of these propaganda efforts. Moreover, the issue of Fascism in Italy was a contentious one among Italians in Australia, a large minority fighting with courage and determination against Fascism's representatives in Australia.

This broad study of Italian immigrants before and during World War II covers not only the effects of Fascism, but also records the ordeal of Italian settlers in the cities and the outback during the Depression and the difficulties they faced after the outbreak of the war. It deals with a subject that has long been neglected by scholars and is an important contribution to the history of Italian migrants in Australia.

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Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia

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1922-1945

Gianfranco Cresciani

Australian National University Press

Canberra, ACT, London, England and Trumbull, Conn. USA

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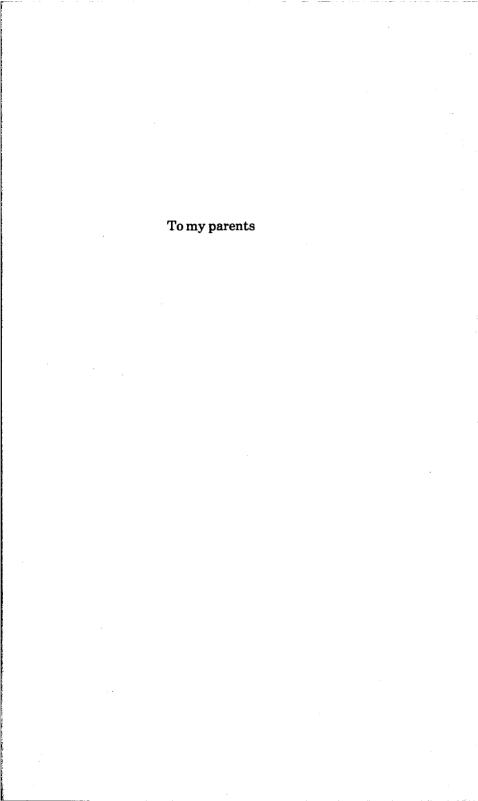
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Foreword

Historians in Australia are divided into two castes. There are the historians of Australia, and the historians of 'other places', of America, Asia, Africa or Europe. In the common rooms of academe one caste scorns the other. According to one faction, devotion to the study of the world outside Australia is really only a cultural cringe, self-indulgent, irrelevant and somehow unpatriotic, disloyal to Australia's values and needs. The other faction instead derides the primitiveness of Australian historiography, always ten years behind the times, at best 'a subject which can be got up in a week', with its bizarre or quaint interest in convicts and governors, or in the dionysian frenzy of third-rate bush balladeers.

No doubt a society gets the historians which it deserves. A debate, or rather a division, on whether Australia's interests and characteristics are local, parochial, born in the bush and nurtured in the tyranny of distance, or international, part of the history of colonialism and capitalism, is central to much Australian intellectual and political life. As a trained historian of modern Europe, I have made my own decisions, and polished my own prejudices. I believe that Australia scarcely exists, and that I scarcely exist as an Australian. As a resident of Sydney, a European city, inconveniently placed in the Pacific, but conveniently part of the international air routes, and sometimes reached by the international news services, I look outwards, away from the bush of flies and snakes and inconvenience, of a cruel dead landscape, sterile, forbidding and unmastered. In the last decade, I have been to Rome more

often than I have been to Canberra, let alone to Melbourne. I seem yet another alienated Australian academic, Australian-born and therefore unable to slough off a skin made up of potato scallops, Alan McGilvray and The Potts, but staying in Australia only because the pay is good and . . . there always (?) are sabbaticals.

Yet, in so many ways, Australia ought to have changed since 1945, and perhaps it has changed, and perhaps I exaggerate my alienation. Always an immigrant country, Australia has stopped being only the venue for Anglo-Saxon or Celtic kith and kin, and has been enriched by Italians, Greeks, Turks, Lebanese, Vietnamese and many others. What a joy that in Sydney I can eat as well or better as in many a European city. And is it not time that our historians began to recognise that 'Australian history' now means not just the derring-do of Governor Bligh or Colonial Secretary Stephen, but also the political and social history of Italy, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Vietnam and the rest?

Migration weaves a complex web, not surprising given that even Robert Bruce's spider would tire at the labour, the travail of the migrant. and Australians are only beginning to study it. Sometimes in such study, there is absurd, if predictable bias. Some 'Italo-Australians' discover only in Australia that they are or were Italians; when in Italy they were Calabrians or paesani. Political views or even knowledge of the country of origin freezes at the moment of departure, and those in the political leadership of migrant communities go on fighting out the disputes of 1948 or 1943 or 1922 like flies warring in amber. Not only Australian historians have been forgetful of the migrant experience. Italy, that great emigrant country, has still not produced a serious historical investigation of emigration, and in fact the best study of Italian emigration in any language remains R. F. Foerster's, The Italian Emigration of our Times, written by an American in 1919.

For all these reasons, Cresciani's study, despite the limitations of a monograph, must be welcomed by both castes in the common-rooms. Cresciani himself is a migrant, although one not dominated by the passions and ambitions of Italo-Australian politics. As a Triestine too, he carries the traditions of Central Europe, the Habsburg Empire as well as those of

Italy, and can comprehend the fatuity of narrow nationalism. What the book says must stand for itself, but in introducing it to its readers, I must acknowledge Cresciani's achievement. Cresciani reached Australia already an adult. In completing this work he has had to master English, and survive the lottery of under-graduate and post-graduate work as the head of a household, employed in an Italo-Australian business concern, and without the luxury of a Ph.D. scholarship or a university post. Yet no-one could have been more indefatigible in tracking down lost evidence, more enthusiastic and judicious in using the new techniques of oral history. Best of all for the author of this preface, a lecturer in Italian history at the University of Sydney has been granted an able and efficient student, and is granted a loyal, stimulating and independent friend.

R. J. B. Bosworth

Abbreviations

AA Australian Archives
ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato
APC Italian Communist Party Archives
CPA Communist Party of Australia
DDI Documenti Diplomatici Italiani
JAMP Jesuit Archives, Modotti Papers
USNAID United States National Archives, Italian

USNAID United States National Archives, Italian Documents

Preface

During the years between the two World Wars, Italian migrants in Australia, for the first time in their history in this country, organised themselves in political associations and carried out political activities. Undoubtedly, one of the main motives which prompted them to become involved in politics was the Fascist Party's coming to power in Italy. Their attitudes of support or opposition to the new Italian regime were dictated by the same political as well as social, economic and emotional reasons which divided Italians at home and in other countries.

This study aims at illustrating the attitudes of the migrants towards the Fascist phenomenon demonstrating that, contrary to the claims of the Fascist authorities of those years and of some Italians still living in Australia, Fascism was a dividing force which split the Italian community. The existence of a small but determined anti-Fascist movement demonstrates that this was the case. For this reason, research on the migrants' opposition, on their achievements and failures, fills a serious gap in information on the history of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia. Evidence shows also that this opposition was expressed at a personal level as well as through political bodies; to this purpose, a chapter has been dedicated to Omero Schiassi, who represents the epitome of the middle-class Italian who fought the dictatorship with his teaching, his writings, his close association with migrant workers, in addition to playing an important part in the leadership of the anti-Fascist movement. In addition, this study emphasises that the popularity of Fascism amongst Italians in Australia (as in Italy) varied according to the international and domestic success or failure of the initiatives taken by the regime, with high levels of acceptance, as during the years 1929-36, and periods of crisis, as between 1924-7 and 1937-40. This pattern was nevertheless influenced by the socio-economic conditions peculiar to Australia, which conditioned the political behaviour of Italian migrants who, generally, reacted more favourably to the regime's policies than did their brothers at home.

This book does not aim at being a history of Italians, nor a history of Australian political attitudes towards Fascism and Italians between 1922 and 1945, although these two aspects are an essential part of it; furthermore, it does not claim to be the definitive account of this fascinating episode in Italian and Australian political history. A great deal of documentary information in Australian and Italian archives is still restricted, preventing historians from giving a picture conclusive in all its details.

It is only to be hoped that people who have the history of Italians in Australia at heart will continue in this effort; now, by recording the recollections of those who witnessed the events, before time obliterates their memories and the facts pass unrecorded into the grave, and later, by retrieving and disclosing the evidence stored in private and state archives in Italy and Australia.

Winston Hills, 1978

G.C.

Acknowledgments

In completing what has turned out to be a six-year research project, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the Literature Board of the Australia Council for having awarded me a Special Purpose Grant which has enabled me to study this hitherto unresearched field of Australian history.

I am indebted to many people for help in writing this book. Dozens of institutions, associations and individuals have been consulted or interviewed to gather and corroborate facts. It is not possible to pay an adequate tribute here to all concerned. It would be very remiss of me, however, if I failed to acknowledge with my warm thanks the following sources of assistance, advice, information and kindness.

First and foremost I am grateful to Dr R. J. B. Bosworth, University of Sydney, for suggesting this study and for constructive and perceptive criticism of the draft manuscript. Thanks are also due to Mr A. E. Cahill, University of Sydney, who offered some useful suggestions. I also want to thank F. Battistessa, O. Brida, F. Carmagnola, Prof. A. R. Chisholm, N. Costantino, M. Cristofaro, P. De Angelis, E. Del Pin, R. Gibson, V. E. Giuffrè, F. La Rosa, F. Rando, T. Saviane, Dr P. Sonnino, L. Stellato, B. Walker, J. Waten and G. Zammarchi, who not only graciously consented to permit me to tape record interviews with them, but allowed me, in some cases, to see and retain their personal papers.

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I am also indebted to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation for allowing me to use some still classified material.

All photographs are reproduced by courtesy of the Mitchell Library, Sydney, with the exception of the photograph of Battistessa in 1927, which was supplied by Mr Battistessa; of the Italian anti-Fascists in Melbourne in 1927, supplied by Mr P. De Angelis; of Carmagnola's address to a political rally at the Matteotti Club, made available by the New York Public Library; of an anti-Fascist poster on a lorry in Melbourne, made available to me by Mr O. Brida; of Francesco Fantin, made available by Mr L. Stellato; of the members of *Italia Libera* marching in Melbourne, kindly donated by Mr O. Brida; of the members of *Italia Libera* in Melbourne crating clothes, supplied by Mr L. Stellato.

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1The Advent of Fascism in Australia, 1922-1927

Emigration is an evil, because it pauperises the nation of active elements which go abroad to become the red globules of anaemic foreign countries. This evil can be minimised by organisation and converted into a weight in our favour in the international scale.

(From Mussolini's preface to the Report of the Italian Commissioner-General for Emigration for the years 1924-1925.)

The successful bid for power of Mussolini's Fascist movement on 28 October 1922 stirred the political emotions of those Italians who, at home or abroad, had witnessed the tumultuous events of World War I and its aftermath. At home, many, although disturbed by the squadrists' violent methods, saw in the Fascist victory a return to law and order, a reaffirmation of the values of patriotism, property and pride in the bourgeois social order, which they saw threatened by the 'anti-national' forces of Socialism and Communism. On the other hand, many Italians abroad welcomed Mussolini because they believed that in future their interests would be protected better by this 'man of the people' who had himself been a migrant and who had already manifested his concern for their welfare.¹ Perhaps more significantly, they accepted Fascism

enthusiastically, even in its most irrational and chauvinist aspects, because they saw in it a weapon of defence against the discrimination of which they were often victims, and because Fascism was certainly not widely seen initially as a different ideology from liberalism.

Support for Fascism was so spontaneous abroad that by February 1923 over 150 Fascist Party branches had been opened in many countries.2 Naturally the Fascist government saw with pleasure the growth of party organisations among its migrants. Mussolini himself in November 1922 declared in an to Roberto Cantalupo that he intended to disseminate abroad in successive phases his own political and social ideas, by way of the Italian emigrants.3 Yet during the early 1920s this plan was not pursued vigorously, mainly because Fascism had not worked out the details of a systematic policy of expansion, nor created the instruments and the organisation able to carry it out. Even the strengthening of the Press Secretariat of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, one of whose tasks was to cast a favourable image of Fascism abroad, was a step dictated rather by reasons of internal politics than by the need to attract the migrant masses abroad to Fascism.4 Mussolini needed time to consolidate his position at home, to persuade his opponents that he would govern within the political framework of the liberal state, and was concerned that the other European governments, already alarmed by the revolutionary impact of Communism, would see in the spreading of Fascism and of its violent means another threat to their democratic institutions. In order to allay their fears, in November 1922 Mussolini declared that Italian Fascism, although pleased by the birth of similar movements in other countries, had no intention of creating another International.⁵ The Fascist Grand Council of February 1923 carried a motion which instructed the Fascist branches abroad to observe the laws of the host countries and to avoid creating incidents which could mar the relations between Italy and these countries.⁶ The diffusion of Fascism differed according to the socio-political conditions peculiar to the Italian communities in different countries. For instance. while in the United States, owing to the size of the Italian settlement and to the political climate, Fascism was quick in

establishing itself and in being widely accepted,⁷ in far away countries with small Italian communities of recent migration, the movement was slow in making headway.

Australia was one such country. Italian migrants had not been attracted to this continent in large numbers: the census of 1921 showed that there were only 8,135 Italians in Australia, a very small increase in comparison with the previous census of 1911 (6,719 Italians) and of 1901 (5,678 Italians).8 Nor were they organised to any appreciable extent. There are many reasons, before World War I, for their not having created state-wide or nation-wide institutions which would promote their interests. The size of the Italian settlement worked against the creation of solid political organisations with a large following. Moreover, most Italians were scattered in the countryside, on the goldfields, in the mines, as agricultural workers, fruit pickers, farmers, tobacco growers, canecutters. The distance and the lack of means of communication prevented them from organising themselves. Those in the cities, mainly greengrocers, market gardeners and labourers. because of a sheer lack of interest and capacity to understand the advantages that a political organisation would bring, kept themselves aloof from any active role in politics and from the people who were advocating it. Also, many migrants were seasonal workers, never stopping for long at any one place, thus making it difficult for them to take part in social or political activities. The economic conditions of the period must also be borne in mind: the sheer poverty of most members of the Italian community did not allow for much time to engage in new activities; the effort of keeping themselves just above the bread line, by working long hours under harsh conditions. deterred the great majority of Italians from any organised attempt to keep abreast with the cultural and political life of Italy and from trying to set up in their new homeland the leagues, the co-operatives, the unions and the political parties which had played an important role in their lives in Italy.

The lack of political sophistication was also due to the nature of Italian immigration in this country. Many migrants were illiterate peasants or uneducated agricultural workers; there was no articulate middle class, no intellectual élite which could express the variety of ideas that are the necessary ferment for

a positive political action. In addition to their small numbers, their isolation, their economic plight, their lack of education and of leadership. Italians had to cope with the prejudice and even the hostility of those Australians who discriminated against them out of ignorance and racial hatred. Many migrants were afraid of expressing their own views and were inhibited from joining any political association; this fear, which was greater in inverse proportion to the number and to the strength of the scattered migrant settlements, was a further reason for the majority of Italians to withdraw into the secluded life of the family nuclei. Many migrants, as they became alienated from the social environment in which they lived, were strengthened in their allegiance to the culture, traditions and history of their country of origin, and afforded their passive support to anyone who was praising or defending their nation and themselves. Nationalism was therefore an element of reaction to the existing situation; it was, among the Italians in Australia, an ideology of defence.

This nationalism caused by fear was noticed by attentive Australian observers. Major-General G. Ramaciotti, an expert on Italian affairs, pointed out that:

the Italian abroad, with very few exceptions, always keeps a warm corner of his heart for his Mother Country, even in the rare case of having no family ties there. The War Loan issued by Italy in 1916 was subscribed for in the Commonwealth to a considerable extent. And Fascismo had not been born in those days.⁹

When, in 1922, Fascism came to power in Italy, it found fertile ground among Italians in Australia. If, as acutely pointed out by Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Fascism, as an effective movement, was born of fear', 10 the basic ingredient for the advancement of the new political credo from Italy was already present within the Italian community in Australia. Fascism became popular among its members, isolated as they were from the active political life of Australian society, fearful of the xenophobia shown by sections of the Australian community, strongly nationalist in order to conceal their inferiority complex. To them Fascism represented from the beginning the voice of the Fatherland, the guardian of the integrity of the national

dignity, the power which showed determination in defending the Italian honour either at home, against the threat of alien ideologies, or abroad, as they believed it had been proven by the Corfu incident in 1923, when Italy occupied militarily this island in reprisal for the murder of an agent of Italian military mission on the Greek-Albanian border. For these reasons Fascism was identified with the Fatherland; 'It is obvious', wrote the *Italo-Australian* in one of its first issues, 'that Fascism had prevailed and today we can say indeed that it is synonymous with Italy'. From now on, patriotism, nationalism and Fascist principles became the artfully entwined and inseparable elements of the ideology which motivated the emotional behaviour of Italian migrants with respect to their situation.

The advent of Fascism in Australia highlighted the existing political and social problems at the time when, between 1922 and the end of 1927, the character of Italian settlement underwent a deep change. Owing to the introduction of the quota system by the United States, Italian immigration to Australia increased dramatically during these years. The net immigration statistics for the period 1922 to 1925 show that 12,536 Italians settled in Australia, while during the period 1926 to 1930 a further 11.975 arrived, most of them in the years 1926 and 1927 since, in July 1928, the Italian and the Australian governments came to a gentleman's agreement which drastically reduced Italian migration to Australia. 12 This significant inflow of newcomers changed considerably the pattern of settlement of Italian migrants and created the conditions necessary for the development of political activities. More Italians settled in the cities and in the large industrial centres, thus making possible the founding of newspapers, the opening of clubs and the establishing of Fascist branches.

The first Italian newspaper to appear during the Fascists' bid for power was the *Italo-Australian*, which began publishing in Sydney on 9 August 1922. Its owner, Francesco Lubrano, and its editor, Antonio Folli, showed from the first issue where their sympathies lay. This weekly, together with the monthly *Italian Bulletin of Australia*, the official organ of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Australia, which

appeared in Sydney in November 1922, were, between 1922 and the end of 1924, the principal — if not the only — channels through which Fascism was made known to Italians in Australia. In every issue they gave ample and sympathetic cover to the history and the doctrine of the movement and reprinted editorials from Italian papers favourable to Fascism or articles from foreign papers praising it. Their support for Mussolini's policies was unreserved; not only did they approve of the use of violence, both physical and political, which was killing Italian democracy, 13 but also they looked with favour on an aggressive Fascist foreign policy. For instance, Mussolini's dealing with the Corfu incident was welcomed since it was believed that as a consequence of it the European powers would respect and fear Italy more and that Italians abroad would also benefit by it. 14 The pursuit of an imperial policy was advocated openly by the Italo-Australian. Folli wrote

Italy has no imperialist ideals, excepting that she must endeavour to keep her trade routes clear and well protected, and the desire for further markets where her manufactured goods could be disposed of, and nations ready to welcome her overabundant population. ¹⁵

It became clear at this time that the Fascist government wanted not only to influence the political thinking of individuals, but also aimed at conditioning all aspects of their cultural, economic and social life. Italians abroad were urged to show their patriotism and their sense of discipline in everything they did; every public meeting was meant to be a manifestation of nationalism and, as such, of support of Fascism. This all-pervasive influence extended even religion: as the Italo-Australian remarked. 'religious ceremonies abroad often become manifestations of italianità'16 since 'those priests who arrive frequently in Australia are missionaries not only of religious faith, but often are apostles of healthy patriotism'. 17 Even the murder of Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti by a gang of Fascist thugs, some days after he had courageously spoken in parliament against Mussolini's rigging of the 1924 elections, was exploited by the Italian press in Australia to stir up support for Mussolini's

government. Reporting the assassination as an event which had 'nothing whatever to do with the aims of Fascism', 18 but which was used to instil hatred against the regime and therefore against Italy, the *Italo-Australian* warned its readers that to plot 'against the stability of the Government... at this time is tantamount to plot against the Fatherland'. 19 There was no possible alternative: either to stand by Fascism or to understand and accept the fact that 'the fall of Mussolini would mean chaos, Communism...'. 20

If the supporters of Fascism in Australia feared a political backlash among the migrants, such fears were unfounded. For the reasons mentioned, the majority of migrants remained indifferent, or unaware, or apathetic to the political events taking place in Italy during 1924. Also, the early settlers had not experienced the class struggle of 1919-21 and had not lived the dramatic months of the civil war and of the March on Rome when columns of armed Fascists converged on the capital and King Victor Emmanuel III handed power to Mussolini; to them the word Fascism meant next to nothing, or only what the Italian press wanted them to believe.

Absent from the Australian scene were the first-hour Fascists, the arditi, the squadristi, the sansepolcristi, the diciannovisti; that is, those people personally involved with the rise of Fascism: they began arriving in Australia only at the end of 1924, and with them migrated many of their enemies. Because of this, the struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism, momentarily abated in Italy, continued in Australia after this year, fanned by some of the most recent arrivals. This struggle, and the strengthening of the anti-Fascist opposition, accelerated the formation of Fascist organisations.

The birth of a Fascist movement in Australia depended also on other causes. In the first place, before 1925 an active policy in support of Fascism could not be carried out by the Italian diplomatic representatives for the simple reason that, with the exception of the consul-general, there were no other consuls de carrière in Australia. Besides, the consul-general, Grossardi, could not, and perhaps was not willing, to carry out such policy owing to his personal political beliefs and to his relations with the Italian community.

Antonio Grossardi was born in Parma of an aristocratic family. Antonio, who had a brother a General of the Carabinieri, distinguished himself in politics at an early age. He became mayor at twenty-three and was a member of the Provincial Council of the Democratic Party for four years.²¹ At the 1919 elections he was defeated by the Socialist candidate and retired from politics. Soon after, he asked the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs for a posting abroad, and in January 1920 was appointed consul-general in Melbourne.²² Soon he became a controversial figure within the Italian colony in Australia. It was rumoured that Grossardi was a supporter of the reformist Socialists and a friend of one of their leaders. Bissolati, and in 1922 the rumours became so persistent that he was compelled to release a statement to the press denying the accusation.²³ His rash methods in dealing with the representatives of the Italian Establishment in Australia antagonised many of them.²⁴ For instance, he dismissed Dr V. Marano, who had been honorary consular agent in Sydney for 42 years, for no apparent reason other than of appointing to this position his friend Luigi Buoninsegni Vitali. 25 To complicate the picture further, the Italo-Australian from 1922 to 1928 carried on a violent campaign against the consul-general, accusing him of anti-Fascism, of protecting people who, during World War I, had incited Italians not to return to Italy to serve in the army and. generally, of abusing his powers and authority.²⁶ The paper even ventured to publish an open letter to Mussolini appealing for his intervention to recall Grossardi on grounds of his political ideas and character.27 Undoubtedly, a great deal of this hostility can be explained by the fact that the wife of the owner of the Italo-Australian, Lubrano, had been seduced by Buoninsegni Vitali and that, as a result, Lubrano had instigated legal proceedings against Grossardi and Vitali.28 The trial of the consular agent ended with the victory of Lubrano, who was granted a divorce, but scorn was added to injury when he was awarded damages of one farthing.29 After this, it was not surprising that Lubrano was behind every fronde against the consular authorities.

Although these conflicts caused by political, economic and personal reasons precluded, during the period between 1922

and 1924, the possibility of political collaboration between the consul-general and the leaders of the Italian community, the situation improved at the end of 1924 mainly because Fascism's astonishing political recovery after the Matteotti crisis convinced all parties that there was no room for major personal divisions. By this time Fascism had become an institution well entrenched in the political life of the Italian nation and, in all aspects, seemingly strong enough to remain entrenched for a long while. The stability of Fascism made a favourable impression upon the Italians abroad, who were eager, in view of the prevailing hostile environment in which they lived, to afford their support to a government which was very vocal in its claims of defending their interests. Therefore, they were ready to pay the price of discipline, obedience and conformism which was exacted from them; many preferred, believed in Fascism. out they sincerely because opportunism, or simply for the sake of conformism, to accept the new reality and became part of that group of the vocal supporters, or of the silent doubtful, or of the indifferent, who subscribed to the opinion that Fascism was Italy, and Italy Fascism. This consensus created the proper conditions for the setting up of institutions through which Fascism would exercise its influence and power also among Italians in Australia. These institutions were mainly social clubs and associations of a cultural or recreational nature. Although a few of these clubs existed before World War I³⁰ and some had been established soon after it,31 only after 1924 were many of them opened under the general political pretext of protecting the migrants' interests, of promoting the cause of italianità amongst the foreigners, of keeping the Italians united and mindful of their country of origin, and of combating anti-Fascist propaganda and activities.

The Dante Alighieri Society was by far the most important cultural institution. On 15 January 1925 some Italians, among whom was the future president, Antonio Baccarini, met in Sydney to set up its first branch in Australia.³² After formal recognition from the Rome headquarters was received, the society was declared officially formed on 28 May 1925, when Mussolini sent a telegram of congratulations.³³ From the outset the Dante Alighieri Society carried out cultural

activities in favour of Fascism, by arranging lectures or issuing statements in support of the regime.³⁴ Among the associations which sprang up at the time were La Rinascenza (The Rebirth), a youth club which was officially opened in Sydney in July 1925, whose aim was to instil Fascist ideals in the younger generations³⁵ and the Italo-Australian Association, which was formed in Brisbane in June 1925 by Mons. Ernesto Coppo³⁶ and which, although a religious organisation, was closely linked with the Fascist authorities and their political programs. The Italo-Australian Association opened branches in Sydney and Melbourne, and in both cities presidents of those branches became people who were or would have been trustees of the Fascist Party in Australia: Virgilio Lancellotti in Sydney and Mario Melano in Melbourne. 37 Clubs were also opened in areas where anti-Fascist activities were conspicuous: for instance, in November 1926, a new club, the Club Italia, was inaugurated at Lithgow, New South Wales, a mining centre where many Italian anti-Fascists worked, by the Sydney vice-consul. Carosi, who declared that its purpose was to spread there the principles of patriotism, brotherhood and assistance.38

By far the most important political event which took place in 1925-26 was the creation in Australia of overseas branches of the National Fascist Party. This was made possible by three political initiatives taken by the Fascist government with respect to Italian settlement in Australia: the renewed concern shown at the end of 1924 for the problems of migration, the determination to extend its political influence over its nationals, and the strengthening of its diplomatic representation.

Although Mussolini in 1922 believed that Australia was an outlet too distant for Italian migration,³⁹, the restrictions imposed by the United States and the increase in Italian migration to Australia during 1923 and 1924 prompted the Fascist government to reassess its policy on migration. Italian emigration had been administered by an independent government department up to 18 January 1923, when it was brought under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office, and a Commissariat-General for Emigration was formed. The new commissariat, responsible to the Prime Minister, developed

into a very important and well organised administrative unit, branching out in all directions regardless of the ministerial departments whose activities it often took charge of. ⁴⁰ In 1924, in order to find a solution to the problem of disposing of Italy's surplus population, the commissariat called for an international conference on migration, to be held in Rome. The conference was opened on 15 May 1924 by Mussolini, who in his speech declared that Italy 'must follow the fate of its sons beyond the Frontier'. ⁴¹ As a result, it was decided to send to Australia a Commissioner for Emigration, whose duty it was to assist and protect the Italian migrants, to establish liaison with the Australian authorities and to report to Rome on the local situation. The commissioner, Virgilio Lancellotti, arrived in Melbourne in November 1924. ²⁴

Lancellotti was a romantic adventurer. Born at Carpi, in the Emilia, in his youth he sailed to see the world and worked, among other things, as a mechanic in New York, a miner in West Virginia, a gold prospector in Alaska, a salesman in Ecuador, a labourer in Arizona. He fought with the peasants in Mexico, against the dictatorship of Diaz, for the movement Land and Freedom, and in 1914 returned to Italy. He took part as a Lieutenant in World War I, and at the birth of Fascism was the founder of the Fascist branch at Carpi. Lancellotti performed his duty well and after ten months in Australia, in August 1925, went back to Rome to report personally to Mussolini on the situation of the Italian colony.43 While in Rome, he also attended the first Congress of the Overseas Branches of the Fascist Party, which began meeting in October 1925.44 The congress was a resounding victory for the Secretary-General of the Fasci Abroad, Bastianini, and for the secretariat itself, which aimed at assuming greater prominence by increasing the party's control of all Fascist groups outside Italy and at placing greater emphasis on a concerted action of Fascism abroad, where, as Mussolini said, 'the method will be different in different countries, but the spirit will be the same'.45 However, at the beginning of 1926 there were no official branches of the party in Australia, and Lancellotti, upon his return in January, 46 became actively involved in their formation until June, when he was appointed vice-consul in Perth.47

During this period Italy upgraded its diplomatic representations in Australia. Together with the Perth vice-consulate, other vice-consulates *de carrière* were opened in Sydney in August 1925, in Brisbane in November 1926 and in Townsville in July 1927.⁴⁸ The appointed vice-consuls were respectively Mario Carosi, Count Gabrio di San Marzano and Francesco Pascale.⁴⁹

The consul-general, the new consular authorities and migrants who were members of the Italian Fascist Party began forming official branches at the end of 1926. During the previous years several attempts had been made by some sympathisers to set up party branches without obtaining beforehand Grossardi's or Rome's approval. Already in February 1923 there were rumours that Italians in Australia were forming local Fascist branches,50 and in March 1923 an attempt to open one in Sydney actually took place, but was unsuccessful.⁵¹ These rumours alerted some Australian newspapers such as Truth, and the Australian Labor Party, to the impending danger of Fascism establishing itself Australia, to the point that some delegates to the Australian Labor Party's Victorian Annual Conference, held in Melbourne during Easter 1923, asked the federal government to expel all Fascists and to take steps to prevent the landings in Australia of other Italian supporters of that doctrine. 52 Uncorroborated evidence shows that an unofficial Fascist branch was formed in Adelaide on 15 November 1923 (or 1925; there are conflicting reports on the year), with a male membership of eighty-five and a female one of twenty, but it must have had a short life, since the official Fascist Section was established only in 1927.53

Although Rome early in 1924 appointed Buoninsegni Vitali⁵⁴ and in 1925 Virgilio Lancellotti⁵⁵ trustees of the Fascist Party in Australia, to promote the cause of Fascism, there were other serious difficulties, hindering the formation of official Fascist branches. Rome and its representatives in Australia did not want to afford formal recognition to party branches set up by people who were rebellious to the authority of the consuls, while rivalry between officials of the party and of the government delayed the birth of official sections. Typical is the case of the *Fascio* which was opened in

Melbourne on 17 October 1925 by a group of sympathisers led by Eustacchio Del Pin, who was at that time interim delegate for the Fasci in Australia.56 Del Pin, a personal friend of Lubrano, having been denied official support by Grossardi, interpreted the behaviour of the consul-general as being hostile towards Fascism and sent a report to the Secretariat-General of the Fascist Branches Abroad in Rome, illustrating what he believed to be the negative attitude of the Italian diplomat.⁵⁷ The Secretariat-General, obviously pleased to receive evidence in support of its claim that it was the party's and not the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' task to ensure that Italian diplomats abroad would also be fervent Fascists, backed Del Pin's allegations⁵⁸ and sent the report to Dino Grandi. The Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs did not accept the accusations against Grossardi nor the suggestions that the Fasci abroad should oversee the conduct of the diplomatic representatives; as Grandi noted on the report, 'Nonsense. It is the Government which fascistizza the Consulates'.59

Nevertheless the report caused some concern in Rome about the political situation in the community and in August 1926 Mussolini asked Grossardi to send a report on the activities of the Fasci in Australia and on the men who were at the head of the movement. O Apparently he was unaware of the fact that at that time there was not a single official Fascist branch in Australia. In his telegram, the Duce outlined clearly the subordinate position of the Fascist branches with respect to the diplomatic authorities and, consequently, the ultimate moral and political responsibility of the consuls. Mussolini wired Grossardi:

Naturally, it must be clear that the *Fasci* are an organisation of private citizens who, if they are worthy, must be supported and assisted by the Government Representative without the least interference on their part in the attributes and therefore the responsibilities of the consular authorities.⁶¹

Mussolini's and Grandi's emphasis on the pre-eminent role of the representatives of the Italian state reflected their preoccupation with the then raging conflict for political supremacy between the state bureaucracy and the new arising party bureaucracy; as Lancellotti well put it:

we Fascists, who hold an official position abroad, are resented by all the personnel of the Commissariat also because we have been imposed upon them by the Party and even more because somehow we are in control of [their political activities]. 62

The consequences of this conflict of interests were felt also in Australia. For instance, while, according to Lancellotti, the Secretariat-General of the Fascist Branches Abroad was anxious to see party branches opened in Australia and was supporting men such as Del Pin, 63 the representatives of the Italian state were not. In January 1926 Lancellotti warned Del Pin to be careful in speaking with the Inspector-General of Migration, Rostagno, then visiting Australia, because 'he is a confidant of the Commissioner-General De Michelis who does not favour the expansion of Fascism abroad'. 64

Nevertheless, Mussolini's support for Consul-General Grossardi was the deciding factor which cleared the way for the creation of party sections in Australia. The first one was opened in Melbourne on 31 October, 1926. On this occasion the consul-general seized the opportunity to tell the two hundred and fifty Italians assembled at his residence that it was their duty to pay unquestioned obedience to the representatives of Italy in Australia and to avoid being involved in Australian politics in order not to cause conflicts. 'Abroad', stressed Grossardi, 'there are no administrations to conquer nor a policy to carry out . . . Fascism's objectives are merely cultural and sentimental'. 65

Soon after, official Fascist branches appeared in other parts of the Commonwealth. In Sydney, a Fascio was already established by March 1927,66 when its president, Napoleone Costantino, commemorated the foundation of the Italian Fasci, while in May 1927 a Women's Branch of the Fascist Party was founded in Sydney.67 On 5 June, 1927 a Fascist branch was opened in Adelaide, where the consular agent, G. Amerio, became also Fascio Secretary.68 In August 1927, the Women's Group of the Fascio was formed in Melbourne under the Presidency of Mrs Fornari.69 The opening of these branches was accompanied by the Fascist rituals, the flags, the songs, the raised arms, which prompted the Italo-Australian to

comment with emphatic pleasure, although with exaggeration, that 'Fascism is not a Party any longer, but a religion which inspires faith and dignity to the creative and united citizens of our Fatherland'.⁷⁰

By 1927 the Fascist movement in Australia was getting considerable support from the Italian community⁷¹ as well as from the Catholic Church and from some Australian sympathisers. Brisbane's Archbishop Duhig was one of the most outspoken defenders not only of Italians' civil rights but also of Fascism as a social doctrine, 72 and Italian priests were invariably present at Fascist rallies and spoke in favour of the regime. Also Australian supporters of Fascism began organising themselves. On 2 November 1925, Capt. James O. Hatcher announced the formation in Melbourne of an Australian Fascist branch which was in close liaison with the British Union of Fascists in London, while another branch opened at the same time in Hobart.73 Yet another branch was established in Adelaide in April 1926 under the leadership of F.W. Darley. 74 These branches, which continued to exist up to the outbreak of World War II, were formed mainly by individuals or small units of two or three persons at most, and were closely watched by the Australian Security Service which, during the 1930s, checked their correspondence and screened their courier with the BUF British Headquarters, a stewardess on the Oronsay, who was in touch with the leaders of the movement in England, particularly Beckett and Joyce (the celebrated Lord Haw-Haw during World War II). After 1936 the Australian Fascist branches were linked with Nazism through German connections and also through their association with the resident chief of the NSDAP (Nazi Party) in Australia 75

There is no evidence that during the years 1925-7 the British Union of Fascists branches in Australia were co-ordinating their activities with the Italian Fasci; the only contact between British Fascist sympathisers and Italian Fascists took place in 1927 on the occasion of the series of lectures on Fascism given in Sydney and Melbourne by Brigadier-General Charles Rudkin, the commander of the British artillery during the defence of the Piave River in 1917 and a member of the House

of Commons who, after the war, settled in Italy and became an ardent admirer of Mussolini after meeting him.⁷⁶

Interest in Fascism was not restricted to Australian sympathisers, who, by the end of 1924, were so numerous as to attract Mussolini's attention.77 The federal government also was thoroughly informed on all aspects of Italian public life during the period 1920-27. In March 1920 Prime Minister W. M. Hughes entrusted Major-General G. Ramaciotti with a voluntary mission of inquiry in connection with trade matters and relationships between Australia and Italy, a mission which developed to all intents into an honorary trade commissionership. 78 Ramaciotti, until his return to Australia in November 1927,79 kept the federal government abreast of the political developments taking place in Italy. In his frequent reports he made no attempt to hide his sympathies for Fascism, although he never concealed the negative sides of the movement. Perhaps his views on the regime were best expressed in his Second Confidential Report on Italian Affairs when he argued that:

the outpourings of a nation, great in tradition, inspired by a strong leader, fearless and ambitious to restore the glories of the Roman Empire, who aims to make Italy not only strong but feared, and who, deprecating war, prepares for it, merit, in my opinion, serious attention. Fascismo is well led and organised. Its ramifications extend the world over, wherever Italians are to be found. Its patriotism is kept at constant white heat. Its methods may not be all we could wish, but it has saved Italy from chaos, restored its finances, and given it unbounded faith in the future. It has the Church of Rome on its side. 80

There is no doubt that Ramaciotti's reports contributed decisively to the formation of the Hughes and Bruce governments' attitudes towards Italian Fascism. Both governments preferred to listen to the reassuring aspects of the reports and to ignore the more disturbing references to the anti-democratic, expansionist and violent nature of Fascism. Ramaciotti's emphasis on Fascism as the party of law and order convinced — if need there was — the federal government that indeed, as the *Italo-Australian* put it, 'Italy . . . has no desire to export to Australia or any other part of the British Empire the Fascism which has made the Italy of today', 81 but

instead that 'the goals of the Fascio are peace, tranquillity, work and law-abidingness'. 82

By the end of 1927, the birth of an anti-Fascist movement among Italian migrants, the forming of a Fascist dissident faction, and the concern expressed by some Australian intellectuals and by the Australian labour movement for the expansion of Fascism in Australia, sompelled the Fascist authorities to adopt a hard line in order to overcome the rising hostility. More propaganda in favour of the regime was made, more statements identifying Italians with Fascism were released, more appeals to unity were launched, and more orders to follow the party line were given. The Italo-Australian exhorted; 'Let not a single opportunity go by defending Mussolini against the vilification of ignorant or half formed writers . . . for this manufactured distrust of Mussolini finds an echo in the distrust of and hostility to Italian migrants and traders.'84

As it turned out, this militant attitude generated further hostility against Fascism and Italian migrants. It was a vicious circle which would not be broken during the entire period of existence of Italian Fascism in Australia.

Notes

1 On this, see Giorgio Rumi, Alle origini della politica estera fascista 1918-1923, Bari, 1968, pp. 120-5.

2 Italo-Australian, 24 Feb., 7 April 1923. Fascist branches had been opened in Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Spain, United States, Argentina, Switzerland, Ireland, Panama, Egypt, Albania, Canada and in Italy's African colonies.

3 Mussolini believed that this process of penetration would take place in three stages: 'First, a general campaign would be undertaken to stimulate a sense of national sentiment in all the emigrant masses . . . and a strengthening of their ties with the Mother Country', but this would be done while 'avoiding conflicts with foreign governments and peoples'. Stage two would see a shift to emphasis on the 'new generations' of emigrants. In the third phase there would be a further concentration on a minority of young emigrants 'to achieve the spiritual and cultural penetration of other countries . . . to found.

that is, a policy of prestige, and to entrust it to new organisms to be created, suitable for diffusing Italian culture and civilisation, commensurate with our increased influence in the world' (Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, Princeton, 1970, p. 195).

- 4 Italo-Australian, 30 Dec. 1922.
- 5 Ibid., 25 Nov. 1922.
- 6 Ibid., 7 April 1923.
- 7 On this, see J. P. Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism: the View from America, Princeton, 1972, pp. 86-95.
- 8 Department of Immigration, Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics, Canberra, 1973, p. 12.
- 9 Australian Archives (hereafter AA) CRS A981, item Italy 28, pt III, Ramaciotti, Sixth Report, 30 Sept. 1926, pp. 14-15.
- 10 'The phenomenon of Fascism', in S. J. Woolf (ed.) European Fascism, London, 1968, p. 23.
- 11 Italo-Australian, 28 Oct. 1922.
- 12 On this, see W. D. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia*, Melbourne, 1954, p. 55. Also, AA, CRS A461, item Q349/3/5, pt I. At the end of 1925 there were 24,781 Italians in Australia (AA, CRS A981, item Migration 48, British Embassy, Rome, to Chamberlain, 14 Jan. 1927).
- 13 See Italo-Australian, 16 Dec. 1922 and 19 May 1923.
- 14 Ibid., 22 Sept. 1923.
- 15 Ibid., 31 May 1924.
- 16 Ibid., 12 May 1923.
- 17 Ibid., 15 Nov. 1924.
- 18 Ibid., 30 Aug. 1924.
- 19 Ibid., 13 Dec. 1924.
- 20 Ibid., 13 Sept. 1924. See also Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 Dec. 1924.
- 21 This information was given by Grossardi during his press conference as reported by the Daily Telegraph on 28 Aug. 1922. It is not clear to which party Grossardi is referring, since there was no Democratic Party in Italy at that time. Most probably he wanted to convey the impression that he had belonged to a democratic party, which could well have been the Liberals, the Partito Popolare or even the reformist Socialists. It is indicative that he replied to the accusation that he had supported the Australian Labor Party during the 1919 federal elections by saying that he had arrived in Australia after the elections and thus could not have spoken either for or against that party.
- 22 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 158, Prime Minister's Dept Memorandum, 15 Jan. 1920.
- 23 Daily Telegraph, 28 Aug. 1922.
- 24 In September 1923 Grossardi refused to forward for approval to the Italian government the list of the Councillors of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Australia unless Dr Tommaso Fiaschi, one of its most respected members, withdrew from it. His

opposition to Fiaschi was dictated by reasons of a personal nature. Fiaschi was thus excluded from the council (*Italo-Australian*, 8 Sept. 1923). Also, during a meeting in Melbourne, Grossardi, contested by some Italian leaders, lost control of himself, threw a glass of water at Count Pietro Lalli and was alleged to have shouted 'Kick him out! Throw him out of the window!' (ibid., 1 Sept. 1923).

- 25 Italo-Australian, 2 Sept. 1922; Sun, Sydney, 22 Aug. 1922. Also, AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 161, letter by Marano to Prime Minister Hughes, dated 22 Aug. 1922, which reveals that reasons of economic rivalry between Marano, import and export agent, and Buoninsegni Vitali, Director of the Lloyd Sabaudo, were at the roots of the conflict.
- 26 Italo-Australian, 30 Sept. and 25 Nov. 1922.
- 27 Ibid., 9 Dec. 1922. The letter remained unanswered.
- 28 Ibid., 9 June 1923 and 27 Sept. 1924.
- 29 Ibid., 8 March and 19 April 1924.
- 30 The Circolo Isole Eolie had been founded in Sydney in 1903, while the Club Italia was opened in 1915. In Melbourne before World War I there were the Circolo Cavour and the Circolo Duca degli Abruzzi, and in Geelong the Circolo Savoia (AA, CRS A981, item Italy 28, pt III, Ramaciotti, Seventh Report, 31 Dec. 1927, p. 15).
- 31 The *Lega Italiana* was opened in Sydney on 20 September 1923 (*Italo-Australian*, 23 Sept. 1923), while the *Club Concordia* was founded in Brisbane in September 1924 (ibid., 4 Oct. 1924).
- 32 Italo-Australian, 24 Jan. 1925. See also Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 Feb. 1925, p. 3.
- 33 Italo-Australian, 6 June 1925.
- 34 For instance, at a monthly meeting of the society, Consul-General Grossardi declared that 'both the Government and its programme are guided by Mussolini, the man endowed with a special equilibrium, the man who guided the revolution and whose permanency at the head of the Government is a prolonged national necessity' (Italo-Australian, 12 Sept. 1925). On 27 May 1927, the society gave a party in honour of General Rudkin, a British sympathiser with Fascism, who had lectured in Sydney on the regime (ibid., 9 May 1927).
- 35 Italo-Australian, 23 May and 1 Aug. 1925.
- 36 Ibid., 27 June 1925.
 - 37 Ibid., 4 July and 1 Aug. 1925.
 - 38 Ibid., 6 Dec. 1926.
 - 39 AA, CRS A981, item Italy 28, pt I, Ramaciotti, Ninth Report, 22 Nov. 1922, p. 3.
 - 40 Ibid., pt III, Ramaciotti, Ninth Report, 30 June 1927, pp. 5-6. On 24 May 1927 the Commissariat-General for Migration was suppressed and a General Direction of Italians Abroad was

established, as an integral part of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

- 41 Ibid., pt I. Ramaciotti, Fifteenth Report, 30 June 1924, p. 6.
- 42 Italo-Australian, 15 Nov. 1924.

43 Ibid., 8 Aug. 1925.

- 44 Del Pin Papers, Lancellotti to E. Del Pin, 25 Oct. 1925, The papers are held by the author.
- 45 Cassels, Mussolini's Early Diplomacy, pp. 379-80.

46 Italo-Australian, 9 Jan. 1926.

47 Ibid., 26 June 1926.

48 Ibid., 12 Sept. 1925; 1 Nov. and 6 Dec. 1926; 13 July 1927.

49 Mario Carosi was born at Colenzo (Umbria) in 1899. During World War I he commanded a battalion of arditi in France, where he was awarded by the French Army with the Croix de Guerre. After the armistice he served with the Allied occupation armies in Belgium and in Germany. In 1920 he returned to Italy where he obtained a diploma in business administration at Rome. In 1921 he entered the Italian Diplomatic Service. Sydney was his first posting (Italo-Australian, 12 Dec. 1925). Also, Carosi had been a leading member of the Fascist bands which sowed terror and destruction among the Socialist organisations in Tuscany in 1921-22. It was alleged that he was responsible for several murders and that he was so cynical and boastful about it that, during the civil war days, he was introducing himself as 'Carosi, thirteen murders' (La Libertà, Paris, 29 March 1930; La Riscossa, 20 May 1930).

Gabrio Asinari, Count of San Marzano, was born in 1898 at Turin. He fought in World War I and later graduated in law. From 1922 to 1925 he was political secretary of the Fascio in London, and from August 1925 National Delegate for the Fascist Branches in the United Kingdom (Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 Oct. 1926, p. 26).

Of Francesco Pascale little is known, except that he had a degree in law, had served during World War I in the Artillery Corps and that he was a student of ballistics. In 1928 he returned to Italy for health reasons, and wrote a book on his Australian experience, Tra gli Italiani in Australia (Italo-Australian, 13 July 1927).

50 Italo-Australian, 24 Feb. 1923.

Ibid., 31 March and 30 June 1923; Truth, 25 March 1923.

Italo-Australian, ibid., 14 April 1923. 52

AA, AP538/1, item SA 3074 pt V, Report, Adelaide Fascio 53 Secretary to M. Miserocchi, Royal Commissioner, MV Esquilino, 9 Nov. 1938. Italo-Australian, 15 Dec. 1928.

Italo-Australian, 8 March 1924.

Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 Aug. 1927, p. 21.

56 Italo-Australian, 15 Dec. 1928.

Eustacchio Del Pin. interview. 19 March 1972. 57

- 58 Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (hereafter DDI), Series VII, vol. IV, p. 301, Document 389, dated 10 Aug. 1926, footnote. The Vice-Secretary of the Secretariat-General of the Fascist Branches Abroad, Guido Sollazzo, remarked that 'the part of the report concerning the relations between the Melbourne Fascists and that Consul-General leads us to sad considerations on the way in which our Royal Representative interprets and applies the instructions received by the Ministry'.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Del Pin Papers, Lancellotti to Del Pin, letter, undated.
- 63 Ibid., 25 Oct. 1925.
- 64 Ibid., letter, undated.
- 65 Italo-Australian, 8 Nov. 1926; Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 Nov. 1926, p. 28; Argus, 1 Nov. 1926.
- 66 Italo-Australian, 28 March 1927.
- 67 Ibid., 6 June 1927; Italian Bulletin of Australia, 15 July 1927, p. 26.
- 68 Italo-Australian, 13 July 1927. Also Italian Bulletin of Australia. 15 July 1927, p. 26. G. Amerio was perhaps the epitome of the parvenu Fascist official who outlasted all his colleagues for no other reason than his mediocrity. A police report, probably written in 1940, portrays Amerio as follows: 'Amerio is a slight man who has not visited his native country for fourteen years. His enthusiasm for the Fascist Regime seems to increase in proportion to the length of his absence from Italy. His home and birth-place. San Marzano, is in the mountains near Asti (Prov. Turin) where the inhabitants are not renowned for their good nature: their blood is very mixed. Strong Provencal (Mediterranean French) Swiss and Genoese elements make themselves felt. He is an enthusiastic Fascist, and would possibly be dangerous were it not for the fact that his eagerness far outweighs his intelligence. It would not be an exaggeration to state that he suffers from Italomania. Italy and things Italian are constantly in his thoughts and on his lips. He laments the fact that Italians in this country are so easily Anglicised, but he recognises that such is the case.'

'His social standing is doubtful, his Italian being very indifferent. His vocabularly is rich in abstracts such as "glory" "dignity" "duty" etc. which mean little, as a rule, to people of British race. "Honour" weighs more heavily with such individuals, as a general rule, than honesty."

'He is typical of a Continental Government servant whose official position gives him more authority than his social standing would allow him to expect' (AA, AP 538/1, item 3074, Fascism in Australia pt I, Police Report, undated).

69 Italo-Australian, 7 Sept. 1927.

70 Ibid., 2 Nov. 1927.

71 The support was not only political, but financial as well. The Sottoscrizione nazionale del dollaro (National Appeal for the Dollar), launched by the Italian government in order to pay the war debts to the United States, collected in Sydney U\$\$632.60 (Italo-Australian, 5 June 1926), while the Italians of Melbourne donated U\$\$1,587.11 (Italo-Australian, 15 Nov. 1926). Similarly, the Prestito del Littorio (Lictors' Loan) in 1927 raised in Melbourne alone 511,400 lire (Italo-Australian, 11 April 1927). It is difficult to ascertain how much of this enthusiastic response was motivated by support for Fascism, by nationalism or by simple patriotism.

72 Upon his return from a trip to Italy where he had been received by Mussolini (Argus, 19 Nov. 1927), Archbishop Duhig stated publicly in 1927 that Fascism 'was not understood outside Italy'; that 'many condemned it as a species of tyranny', but 'that it would be wise for those responsible for such statements, before passing judgement, to put themselves in possession of the fullest facts, and endeavour to understand how much the movement was needed in Italy, and how successful it had been'

(Italo-Australian, 24 Dec. 1927; Argus, 14 Dec. 1927). Argus, 3 and 4 Nov. 1925; Italo-Australian, 7 Nov. 1925.

4 News, Adelaide, 22 April 1926.

75 AA, AP 538/1, item SA19070, British Union of Fascists and Australian Fascist Movement, 1926-44.

76 Argus, 24 May and 6 June 1927: Italian Bulletin of Australia, 1

May 1927, p. 4; Italo-Australian, 9 May 1927.

77 In October 1924, Mussolini said in Milan that 'the social legislation of Fascism . . . has made it a world-wide topic in the last two years, drawing many from as far as China, Japan and Australia to study it' (Argus, 7 Oct. 1924).

78 AA, CRS A981, item Italy 28, pt I, Ramaciotti to Prime Minister, 30 June 1922; AA, CRS A981, item Italy 28, pt II,

Prime Minister to Ramaciotti, 28 April 1925.

79 Ibid, pt III, Ramaciotti to Prime Minister's Dept, 30 Sept. 1927.

80 Ibid., pt II, Ramaciotti, Second Report, 30 Sept. 1925, p. 3.

81 Italo-Australian, 5 June 1926.

82 Ibid., 20 June 1927.

83 Argus, 6 Nov. 1925, 30 April 1928. Italo-Australian, 27 March and 11 Sept. 1926; 17 Aug. 1927.

84 Italo-Australian, 22 Nov. 1926.

2

Fascism Consolidates, 1928-1932

In the period since 1929 Fascism has changed from an Italian phenomenon into a universal phenomenon...

(Benito Mussolini, speech at the Rome Royal Opera Theatre on 18 March 1934)

From 1928 to 1932, Fascism in Australia became an established political force, aware of its influence over the majority of the Italian community. Its immediate goal was to rally as many Italians as possible behind those organisations which would preserve their *italianitā* and their political, cultural and emotional links with the Fatherland.

The feeling of growing confidence by the Italian community leaders can be attributed in part to their realisation that the Fascist government had by now silenced its opponents at home and won control of the state. Encouraged by the interest shown for Fascism by similar movements in other countries, the regime was at last beginning to consider the potential influence of its doctrine abroad. The expansion of Fascist ideals outside Italy had been to a certain extent a constant of Mussolini's foreign policy, but it was only at the end of 1925 that a Fascist civilising mission was clearly postulated by the

Duce when he spoke of Italy's need to acquire an empire. The kind of imperialism which he wanted to promote at this stage was based mainly on culture and trade, and aimed at improving Italy's position alongside the world's imperialist powers by gaining a material and moral parity with them by means of friendly international relations.¹

Moreover, the confidence of Fascists in Australia was boosted by the concern which the Italian government showed early in 1928 in the problems connected with the organisation of Italians abroad. In January Cornelio di Marzio resigned from his position of General Secretary of Fascist Branches Abroad and was succeeded by the younger and more ambitious Piero Parini.² In February a new Statute of the Fascists Abroad was issued, aiming at preserving and strengthening the national consciousness of Italian migrants and at discouraging their desire to apply for naturalisation.³

The statute warned those abroad who had already joined the Fascist party that they had a special responsibility to help the regime to fulfil its policy of achieving total control of migrant communities; they were ordered to make 'obedience to the Duce and to the laws of Fascism the governing principle of their private and civil lives'.4 They had to accept unquestioningly the discipline of the Fascist party as the supreme arbiter of all their personal and political rivalries, which ought to be settled within the party organisation. Their duty, as Fascists, consisted not only in giving an example to the Italian community of how the 'new Italians' should behave, politically and socially: they were also entrusted with the task of persuading their co-nationals to support Fascism.⁵ One way to reach this goal, the statute ruled, was to discourage all attempts at political participation and social assimilation by Italians to their foreign environment. 6 Only by maintaining Italian migrants in a political, social and cultural vacuum, by obstructing their interaction with the society in which they lived, could the Fascio obtain total control over them and thus spuriously claim to represent their interests abroad.

The Statute of the Fascists Abroad not only indicated the Italian Fascist Party's willingness to recruit new members among Italians: since by 1928 the party had in effect lost its

struggle to achieve primacy over the state and had become an instrument of the latter, the statute reflected the will of the Fascist government to bring all Italian migrants under its direct control. Corroborating evidence of this is the fact that all Fascist Party activities abroad had to meet with the approval of the diplomatic representative of the Italian government.⁷

The spirit of the statute inevitably clashed with the sovereign rights of many countries, which objected to the presence within their society of an alien minority, professing its sympathy for a totalitarian credo and displaying an ostentatious belief in the cultural superiority of its Fatherland. As early as 1927 the Australian government expressed its concern over the matter of Italians maintaining their allegiance to Fascism once they became Australian citizens:8 and now, dismayed by the content of the statute, could but agree with the British Ambassador in Rome, who signalled that its general purport was 'distasteful to more than one foreign power'.9 The government's concern grew when it was learned from the same ambassador that the Fascist government had approved measures designed to discourage Italians from acquiring foreign nationality and had instructed its representatives abroad that no efforts should be spared to neutralise the influences aiming at securing the denationalisation of Italians 10

To restore the migrants' links with the Fatherland, Rome encouraged their coming to Italy to see for themselves the achievements of the 'new Italy' and, in order to allay any fear of losing their freedom of movement, instructed the Italian diplomats to give a formal guarantee to all prospective visitors that their return to their foreign homes would not be opposed but that, on the contrary, such visits would be welcomed. This subtle approach flattered most Italians who, after their visit to Italy, became ardent propagandists of Fascist ideas in their country of residence.

Besides the statute, another sign of the Italian government's determination to retain the political allegiance of Italians abroad was Mussolini's personal intervention: 'No Italian', the Duce declared, 'who left Italy could denationalise

himself, even if he had acquired nationalisation in the country to which he had migrated.'. 12

Soon, the impact of Rome's instructions to its diplomats was felt also in Australia. Not that the Italian consuls had not previously made their voice heard in defence of Fascism: as the *Italo-Australian* reported on 7 January 1928, it was unquestionable that the consular authorities had 'allowed few opportunities to pass without placing the Italians' case before the Australian public'. ¹³

In view of the considerable influx of Italian migrants during the previous five years — a fact which by itself justified an increase in the Fascists' presence — the Italian government reorganised its diplomatic service in Australia. By Royal Decree printed in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 11 March 1928, it was decided to transfer the consulate-general from Melbourne to Sydney, closer to the new federal capital, Canberra, and to upgrade the legations in Melbourne and Townsville to the status of consulates and that in Adelaide to vice-consulate.

Moreover, during this reshuffle, diplomats of indisputable Fascist faith were promoted to senior positions: for instance, Mario Carosi, the Sydney vice-consul, was appointed consul in Melbourne, Others, such as Francesco Pascale at Townsville, were quick to follow the new instructions received from Rome. Very active with lectures and visits to Italian as well as Australian communities, in January 1928 Pascale began printing a newspaper, L'Eco d'Italia, which never pretended to be anything else but the mouthpiece of the regime's propaganda in northern Queensland. As he later admitted in his memoirs, 14 Pascale during his tenure of office endeavoured to convince Italian migrants that they should become models of industriousness and of patriotism to the eyes of foreigners and that this was feasible not by renouncing Italian citizenship and by becoming assimilated into the Australian environment, which was a shameful decision, 15 but by conserving their national heritage and by being proud of it.16 Also, he arrogated to himself and to his colleagues the right to decide what was in the best interest of the Italian colony in Australia by warning its members that the true values of Italianity would be defended abroad exclusively by Fascist officials.¹⁷

Besides instructing its consuls to see that all articles of the statute would be applied, the Italian government saw fit to intervene directly to prevent the denationalisation of its subjects by curbing, at the end of 1927, Italian immigration to Australia. This measure, which constituted only one aspect of the regime's new demographic policy, was motivated, as Pascale explained in one of his typical rhetorical outbursts:

not only by the intolerable exploitation of the Italian migrant in general, but particularly by the unfriendly welcome with which he is greeted, by the most blatant obstructionism, by the lack of consideration for the Italian worker, although he, with his sweat, his sacrifice and his self-denial has fertilised and made productive in Australia, and particularly in North Queensland, enormous plots of land.¹⁸

Rome manifested its concern for the treatment of its nationals at the time when the Australian government was deeply worried by the social effects which the large number of Italian migrants had on the structure of the Australian population, whom Canberra wanted to maintain dominantly British in character. On the initiative of Prime Minister Bruce, in July 1928 the two governments mutually agreed to limit Italian immigration to a maximum of 3,000 during that year. 19 This arrangement well fitted the new policy of Fascist control over Italians in Australia; further proof that this was Rome's aim was the despatch to Sydney in June 1928 by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of E. Rossi, appointed to inquire on the conditions of Italians and the statement issued in September by Mussolini, whereby semi-skilled workers of reliable Fascist faith were encouraged to emigrate to increase the prestige of Italy abroad, while migrants who had achieved economic success abroad but who were not active supporters of Fascism were encouraged to return home.20

Fascism's regimentation of the life of Italians in Australia became increasingly evident during this period, when the social, educational and recreational activities of most associations, clubs and cultural institutions underwent a stringent scrutiny by Fascist officials, who from now on used them as a vehicle for political indoctrination. As an example, the Dante Alighieri Society became more and more deeply

involved in spreading Fascist propaganda, while the Fascist branches opened schools of Italian for migrant children, whose teachers were or had been either members of the Directorate of the Fascist branch or officers of the diplomatic corps. 21 The teaching of Italian was encouraged by the Fasci not only as a means of maintaining the italianità of the migrant children. but also as a vehicle of political propaganda: for this reason the Fascists strongly objected to Italians speaking and encouraging their children to speak English or their regional dialect. Classes of elementary Italian were opened by the Fascio in Melbourne and in Sydney, while courses at a higher level were inaugurated at the University of Sydney on 23 June 1931 and at the University of Queensland in April 1933, with textbooks supplied by the Italian government. After the Lateran Pacts of 1929 when the Italian government and the Vatican reached an agreement that put an end to the dispute which marred their relations since the unification of Italy, Fascist propaganda was openly made even during religious celebrations.

Besides exploiting existing institutions, the Fascists endeavoured to create new ones, more appropriate to their needs: constant attempts were made to build a Casa d'Italia in areas densely populated by Italians, where all associations could be housed under the same roof and where it would be easier to exercise a proper control over their activities. A Fascist branch was opened at Port Pirie, South Australia, with a membership of approximately 100 while in Sydney the Italian Returned Soldiers were grouped in the Nastro Azzurro Association under the leadership of Filippo Maria Bianchi. The Fascist branches were restructured in their organisation: at the end of 1932 their directorates were modified to include a political secretary, an administrative secretary, a youth supervisor, a person responsible for welfare and propaganda and a person in charge of sporting activities. 23

Italians were also urged to take part in the frequent celebrations of Fascist events: they were ordered to wear black shirts — if party members — and to be actively involved in the ceremonial of the celebrations. The anniversaries of the Birth of Rome (the *Natale di Roma*), of the formation of the *Fasci di Combattimento* and of the March on Rome were com-

memorated with great pomp in the presence of the consular and Fascio authorities. Usually after the speeches and the singing of patriotic songs, films illustrating the achievements of Fascism in Italy were screened. Other important events remembered were Vittorio Veneto Day; the distribution of Fascist Party cards (which was held only once a year); the distribution of presents to the members of the Balilla youth organisation for Christmas; the death of Garibaldi; the Befana Fascista (presentation of gifts to children); even the death of Ariosto. To this flurry of activities must also be added the celebration by members of the Fascist Party on Anzac Day. They were ordered by the Italian consulate to wear the black shirt, to march as a group separate from Australian exservicemen and to lay wreaths on the local cenotaphs.²⁴

In order to mobilise the migrants to externalise their support for the regime, the Fascist authorities exploited every circumstance, even of relative or of no political importance whatsoever. For instance, Italians were exhorted to tune their radios, on 14 and 15 April 1931, to the New Zealand Station 4YA of Dunedin, to listen to the party hymn *Giovinezza* (Youth), ²⁵ and when Italy beat Australia at the Davis Cup in 1930 (the score was 3-2), the Italian victory was interpreted as having a political meaning. ²⁶

The activities of the Fascist consuls compounded the impact made by Italy's aggressive language on the problem of the status of Italian migrants abroad; if the Australian government was discreet in expressing its alarm by way of normal diplomatic channels, the Australian public — especially that section that was traditionally quick in taking every opportunity to smear southern Europeans — was incensed. Smith's Weekly on 29 September 1928 attacked the consulates, accusing them of fomenting Italian nationalism in foreign countries and rhetorically asked its readers the question:

is the Italian Consul-General sent to Sydney, and Consuls into other Australian states to educate, instigate or propel Fascists into enmity, mutual or one sided, in their relations with Australians? Or, even to promote enmity between Fascist and non-Fascist Italians settled in the Commonwealth with resultant disturbance and possible crime?

Other newspapers also condemned the activities of the Italian diplomats in very strong terms. 27

Australian politicians' opinions on the matter were more restrained than the comments of the press, but by no means less hostile: indicative of their mood was the statement released by ex-Prime Minister W. M. Hughes who said that:

we cannot have people in this country who look to Mussolini for orders. There is only one person in this country who can give orders and that is the head of government. It is an intolerable thing for anybody to arrogate to himself that power.²⁸

The tense relations between the Italian migrants and the Australian community were, to a large degree, the result of the touchiness of the Fascist diplomats, who frequently overreacted to situations of relatively minor importance and did not hesitate to bring pressure upon Italians to conform to the social mores of Fascism even when they clashed with the Australian ones. When, during the Waterside Workers dispute in October 1928, some Italian migrants in Melbourne, most probably unaware of the industrial laws of the country, accepted work on the wharves without being members of the trade union, they received full support from the Fascist press and from the consul, Carosi, who strongly protested against the remarks of some members of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council who called the strike breakers 'scabs'.²⁹ The situation threatened to get out of hand when the homes of some of these Italians were bombed: Carosi menacingly warned that, unless protection were given, 'Italians in Melbourne may be forced to take measures to protect themselves'.30 The Italian government quickly acted by sending £200 to help the victims.31

Another episode which well illustrates the consuls' pursuit of the sensational in their political agitation are the consular incidents in north Queensland in the years 1928 and 1930. During the Christmas festivities of 1928, the coat of arms was removed from the Italian vice-consulate at Innisfail and placed on a public toilet further down the street.³² The act, as it was later discovered, was the work of two Australian youths motivated more by alcohol than by virulent nationalism.

Nevertheless, the Italian authorities considered it as an affront to the honour of their Fatherland and began issuing a barrage of statements aimed at mobilising Italian public opinion behind Fascism. The vice-consul of Innisfail, G. Luciano, immediately declared that he regarded the incident as an insult to the Italian nation and that the Italian government would certainly be extremely displeased about the matter, while the Townsville consul, Count di San Marzano, sent a strong note of protest to the Queensland Acting Premier, Forgan Smith. ³³ The consul-general said in Sydney that he was closely watching developments and had done everything that it was his duty to do. ³⁴

Quickly, the Australian government undertook proper measures to minimise this incident. Prime Minister Bruce promptly sent to the Italian government a message expressing:

the profound regret of the Government and the people of Australia for the grave discourtesy which has been shown towards a friendly nation, for whom the people of Australia entertain the highest feelings of respect and good will.³⁵

In the meantime, the Queensland government had taken every possible step to bring to justice the guilty persons. Only one week after the incident, the police discovered the offenders, and two days later they were tried and sentenced. ³⁶ After this, Luciano asked all Italians living in the district to attend the ceremony of restoration of the coat of arms at the consulate, but, perhaps because he was unable to muster enough people to give the event the proper importance, he cancelled it by using the excuse of local floods. The coat of arms was replaced without any ceremony being held.

Another diplomatic incident between the Italian officials and the Australian authorities took place when, for the second time, the Innisfail consular insignia were removed from the building on the night of 28-9 May 1930: again, a report was sent to Italy and representations were made to the Queensland and Commonwealth governments. The consular insignia were found damaged, some days later, in thick bush on a bank of the Johnstone River and promptly returned to the Italian vice-consul.³⁷ This time also it was suggested that they should be

restored before a public gathering but, once again, such a function was not held, most probably for the same reason as before. Nevertheless, on the day of the restoration, all Italian legations in Australia and Italian ships within Australian territorial waters were ordered to hoist the national flag at the precise time when the coat of arms was being put back at Innisfail by the acting consul of Townsville, Mario Melano. The Italian diplomats sent each other telegrams, obviously drafted for public use, celebrating the event. The Italo-Australian revealed that Consul-General Grossardi wanted these ceremonies to be as solemn as possible.

Both episodes showed that the Italian consular authorities in Australia were ready to make political capital out of every incident favourable to the exaltation of Fascist and nationalist feelings. Even if they had no real legal grounds for presenting formal diplomatic demands, they took advantage of the circumstances in order to appear to the Italian community as strong, determined and even capable of rebuffing the federal government.⁴⁰

Yet strong evidence suggests that during these years the Italian community and even some members of the Fascist Party did not respond with overwhelming enthusiasm to the initiatives of the consuls, and as a result their behaviour was bitterly condemned by the spokesmen of the regime. For instance, the celebration in Adelaide of the anniversary of the Fascist conquest of power, on 28 October 1928, was hailed for the first time as a success thanks to the efforts of the viceconsul, G. Amerio, who had carried out an intense propaganda campaign in order to 'instil into the hearts of our migrants that spirit of nationalism which up to now has unfortunately been deficient in Southern Australia'. 41 Similarly, in 1929 the Italo-Australian accused the Sydney Fascist branch of inactivity and the community of lack of patriotism. 42 The poor response of many Italians to the call for political militancy under the flag of Fascism prodded the consuls to study new methods of persuasion which could enhance their credibility among the migrants. Although an analysis of Fascist propaganda in Australia is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that a serious attempt to gain the consensus of the Italian community began at this time.

Naturally, Italian Fascist propaganda in Australia between 1928 and 1932 was not carried out on the initiative of the consuls, but followed the guidelines issued by Mussolini's *Ufficio Stampa* (Press Office) and thus reflected the indecision and the trial-and-error approach which characterised the early stages of Fascism's cultural policy.⁴³ The media used were almost exclusively the press and public lectures.

Propaganda was conducted in two ways: at the official level it was inspired or controlled by the Italian consular authorities while at the unofficial one it was carried out by Italian as well as Australian sympathisers of the regime. By far the most important measure taken by Consul-General Grossardi in 1928 was the launching of two newspapers, the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia and the organ of the Fascist branch in Sydney, Il Littorio, both fully dependent on the propaganda material supplied by the Fascist government. Needless to say, Pascale's newspaper L'Eco d'Italia had also to rely on the same source of information. Unfortunately, not one issue of these newspapers has survived but it can be assumed that they contained articles similar to those printed by the Italo-Australian, which openly promoted the Fascist cause.

Although they enjoyed the benefits of the freedom of expression and repeatedly denounced - and sometimes rightly so — instances of Australian bias against migrants, these newspapers began sponsoring amongst Italians a political and social behaviour which was markedly totalitarian. They warned their readers that, as no Italian newspaper should print statements or opinions which were 'dangerous to the state', 46 so all migrants should conform to this norm and shun any criticism of Mussolini or of Fascism. Italians, it was ordered, must rally in support of these newspapers, defend and diffuse them; to read an 'approved' newspaper (that is, not the Italian anti-Fascist press in Australia), was even a duty for every good patriot: as the Italo-Australian put it: 'he is not a good Italian abroad, who does not read or does not subscribe to the Italian newspaper which is his organ, the spokesman of his rights, the defender of his race'. 47 The sectarian character of the Italian press did not escape the attention of the Commonwealth government, which was extremely warv of allowing the publication of Italian propaganda material: in

fact, for a while it deferred taking into consideration the consul-general's application for the publication of the *Corriere degli Italiani in Australia* until Grossardi officially complained about all the difficulties he had in obtaining a permit.⁴⁸ Also, permission to publish propaganda sheets such as *Il Littorio* and *L'Eco d'Italia*, which were very vocal in advancing Fascism, was withdrawn after a few issues had been printed.⁴⁹ The government's opinion on this matter was that:

it is practically impossible for an Italian newspaper to avoid Fascist or anti-Fascist propaganda, and that it is undesirable, subject to any considerations of policy which may commend themselves to the Prime Minister, that foreign propaganda of this character should be published in Australia in a foreign language.⁵⁰

The Australian government's attitude towards the spreading of Fascist propaganda by the Italian press was vindicated by the events which followed the appearance in Perth of the newspaper La Stampa Italiana. On 24 April 1929 an Italian chemist. Luigi Mistrorigo, lodged an application with the Prime Minister's Department for permission to publish a newspaper.⁵¹ Permission was refused on the grounds of an Intelligence investigation which reported unfavourably on the applicant's activities and character and also revealed that the Italian vice-consul in Perth was opposed to the initiative. 52 Mistrorigo did not despair. Probably guessing that the refusal was motivated by fears that the newspaper would engage in political propaganda, he submitted another application on 22 May 1931, in which he took pains to explain that the paper would be non-political in character and that it would not violate the law, the traditions and the customs of Australia: its scope, instead, would be artistic, cultural and informative.53 Once again the Commonwealth Investigation Branch expressed its adverse opinion: its Director, Major H. E. Jones, flatly stated that:

there is no question of doubt that an Italian newspaper in Perth is not justified or wanted by the Italian community and that Mistrorigo enjoys a most unfavourable reputation. His activities are causing concern to three State Departments.⁵⁴

Notwithstanding this, Mistrorigo was granted permission to publish La Stampa Italiana on the definite understanding that it would be published on the lines indicated in his second application. Consul-General Grossardi deplored the Prime Minister's approval, granted, he said, contrary to the advice given by the Italian consular representative in Perth: he complained to Scullin that this decision was 'hard to believe' since, in his opinion, there were already sufficient Italian newspapers printed in Australia. 66

It appears that the Italian diplomat feared that a proliferation of newspapers, born outside the aegis of Fascist authoritarianism, would also bring a variety of views which would be hard to control: but he was mistaken in the case of La Stampa Italiana. The newspaper revealed itself rabidly Fascist from the first issue, on 3 December 1931, to the last one, on 9 September 1932.⁵⁷ Its sectarian editorials and the overt propaganda material contained in the newspaper came for the first time to the attention of the Perth branch of the CIB when La Stampa Italiana printed an article, 'Lands of Sicily and Calabria'. Inspector D. R. B. Mitchell reported that the article made a grossly insulting reference to both the Australian and the British people who were called 'a gang of criminals, miserable remnants of that tribe of the deported'. He concluded by warning his superiors of the extreme pro-Fascism of Mistrorigo's weekly and reminded them that: 'the danger of a paper printed in a foreign language stirring up trouble, was pointed out on 27.5.29, and it appears La Stampa is on the way of so doing'.58 A few weeks later, another controversial article. 'The India of Today', published in the issue of 17 June 1932 caused a furore. 59 Smith's Weekly urged the consul-general to silence Mistrorigo and asked the Commonwealth government to prosecute the newspaper, adding that 'deportation is the only reasonable action against an Italian of the Mistrorigo species'.60

The sense of outrage was not limited to Smith's Weekly: many people in Perth were offended by the tone of the article and the Commissioner of Police and the Sunday Times and Daily News inquired into what measures would be taken against its author. Major Jones counselled the Prime Minister to withdraw immediately permission to publish the

paper and to prosecute Mistrorigo under Section 24D of the Crimes Act or to deal with him under the Immigration Act and deport him from Australia.62 Lyons, notwithstanding the Attorney-General's opinion that there was ample evidence for prosecution under the Crimes Act, agreed to the suggestion of action under the Immigration Act; it was feared, since a deportation order could not be issued after five years of residence in Australia — and Mistrorigo's years lapsed on 5 October 1932 — that his trial might not be concluded before that date. 63 Consequently, Mistrorigo was given a dictation test on 15 September⁶⁴ and, having failed it, was prosecuted as a prohibited immigrant and sentenced to six months' imprisonment pending deportation.65 He was released on a security of £200 to dispose of his business and assets and deported in November 1932. The Commonwealth withdrew the permission to print La Stampa Italiana. 66 The whole affair is significant because it showed the extent of Fascist propaganda which the Commonwealth authorities were prepared to tolerate: also, because it taught the Italian authorities that their propaganda had to refrain from being too direct and aggressive but instead had to be disguised under nationalist and cultural pretexts.

As already mentioned, the other way of spreading the doctrine of Fascism was the public lecture. Although sometimes disturbed by anti-Fascist demonstrators, such political rallies were met with favour by the Italian community. A typical visit was that of Father Salza, an Italian chaplain and war invalid, who came to Australia in 1928, sponsored by the Italian government to speak to the migrants. His sermons were not restricted to religious arguments, but praised the Italian regime and its policies. He lectured to a group of 150 migrants at Cairns, to another fifty in Gordonvale, visited the Mossman district and stopped at all coastal centres down to Brisbane. Everywhere, as the Italo-Australian reported, his presence was 'welcomed by spontaneous manifestations of italianità and of faith'.67 When he arrived in New South Wales, in January 1929, he visited the communities of Corrimal and Port Kembla and then went on to Tasmania and to Melbourne. In this city, the Fascist branch secretary. Pietro del Mastro, urged all Italians to be present for the patriotic speech of Father Salza. Salza then came to Sydney where he delivered, in the presence of Grossardi and the Sydney Fascist branch secretary, a lecture on 'The new Italy', a blatant panegyric of the regime which was disrupted for a while by some anti-Fascists who attended the meeting. ⁶⁸ A few days later he held a second conference on the theme of 'Our Connotations', in which all great Italians of the past were remembered in order to make the Italians of today aware of their ancestry and proud of the Fascist government. He concluded his speech with an emotional prayer: 'Great Lord, as I was born Italian, make me die only and totally Italian'. ⁶⁹

Lectures were also given by the few Italian intellectuals resident in Australia who were overwhelmingly in favour of the regime. Yet the person who gave the greatest single contribution to the cause of Fascism on a cultural level was the president of the Dante Alighieri Society in Sydney, Antonio Baccarini. 70 Born in Avellino in 1887, Doctor of Science at the University of Florence, where his father was chancellor, during World War I he had been a member of the Italian Mission in London and later liaison officer between the British and the Italian commands on the Italian front. In 1922 he came to Australia with his British wife and decided to settle here. An ardent supporter of Fascism, he soon found himself in the forefront of the cultural activities of the Italian community. Foundation member of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and of the Dante Alighieri Society in Sydney, he was president of the latter for ten years, until 1935. Under his leadership, and particularly during this period, the society spearheaded the intellectual and political propaganda by arranging lectures, concerts and ceremonies, and established its cultural control over the community, in line with the directives set out by Mussolini.71 Perhaps the best Italian speaker in Australia, Antonio Baccarini did not miss an opportunity to explain the Fascist doctrine nor to praise the men at the helm of government in Italy to Italian as well as to Australian audiences.72 Naturally, he was in close contact with the consul-general, who also entrusted him with the administration of the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia.73

The rather élitist character which Baccarini imprinted on the Dante Alighieri Society caused adverse comments in some circles of the Italian community. He was in particular accused of restricting participation in the functions of the society to a few personal friends and supporters, ⁷⁴ a charge which obviously hit the target since in 1931 the Administrative Board decided to democratise the society which at that stage had a membership of only 200, and of that number only fifty were Italians, out of a population of 5,000 Italians resident in Sydney. ⁷⁵

Apart from the reluctance shown by Italians to become members, the important fact which emerges from an analysis of the society's membership is the great number of its Australian sympathisers. To a large extent, Baccarini was more eager to muster the support of distinguished Australians than that of Italian migrants, because he was aware (and rightly so, as already pointed out by Italian historian R. De Felice)⁷⁶ that the public statements of support for Fascism by the former had a considerable impact on the migrants, who mainly belonged to the lowest socio-economic classes and felt uneasy at becoming members of what looked to them — and indeed was — a bourgeois society.

Among the Australian members of the society, special mention must be made of Dr H. M. Moran who was one of the most enthusiastic admirers of the Italian system and of its Duce, and who did not spare a single public occasion to praise the virtues of both. 77 His contribution to the cause of Fascism was such that the *Italo-Australian* did not hesitate to call him 'one of those who can be called teachers of Fascism in Australia, apart from already being a great benefactor of Italy'. 78

Yet it is important to note that Baccarini, and for that matter the entire Italian Fascist movement in Australia, although they strove to ingratiate themselves with the members of the Australian Establishment in order to gain their political support, never attempted to make a firm contact with Australian far right-wing movements, because they were not considered to be a serious alternative within the Australian political context. Even if Fascist propaganda literature was sometimes sent to members of the New Guard, the Australian movement which was openly sympathetic to

Fascism, 79 it was felt that, as Baccarini put it, none of the far right-wing movements which:

have been prominent in the last few years in Australia have anything to do either in form or in substance with Fascism. They were sporadic, even if collective, phenomena of sensibility, not movements deriving from a maturity of thought or conscience.⁸⁰

Besides, an active political involvement by Italian Fascists with an Australian movement would have been in breach of the 1928 Statute of the Fascists Abroad, which preached the political isolation of Italians from their foreign environment. On the other hand, the New Guard did not seek the collaboration of the Fascio, out of nationalism and of detachment from anything which was alien, especially if coming from migrants who were considered by many Guardsmen as a backward race. Also, although Eric Campbell, the leader of the New Guard, admitted his movement's indebtedness to some Fascist principles, he and most of his followers believed that their policies, organisation and operations were essentially Australian in character. Italian Fascism in Australia therefore operated in almost complete isolation from any organised indigenous political movement.

It is not surprising that by the early 1930s Italians in Australia were widely suspected of being Fascists⁸¹ and that the consular attempts at maintaining their national character most preoccupied Australian public opinion, especially in areas where the Italian presence was considerable, as in north Queensland, In 1929 Prime Minister Bruce had to allay public fears in that region: in replying to the accusation made against Italians of wanting to introduce their language and culture, he declared that his government would not encourage nor aid such enterprise.82 The high density of Italian settlement in the districts of Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns, in conjunction with the fact that there, unlike other parts of Australia, Italian labour was competing with Australian labour in the same area of employment, brought the conflict into the open. The British Preference League, an association openly advocating the replacement of foreign labourers in the canefields with British immigrants, was particularly bitter in its attacks against Italians. Such discriminatory attitudes had been an underlying factor in labour relations in north Queensland for many years, but the economic crisis of 1929 and the following wave of unemployment worsened the conflict. To the frequent appeals by the league to dismiss Italian labourers and to starve them away, the Italian community and its representatives reacted firmly. Early in June 1930, over 700 Italian canecutters met at Innisfail and asked the authorities to grant them the same treatment as Australian workers, ⁸³ while on 19 June Consul-General Grossardi released a statement to United Press, defending his compatriots' right to work and condemning Australians who were trying to evict Italians from jobs which the latter had occupied for years. ⁸⁴

The policies of the British Preference League also attracted the wrath of the Italian government and press. Arnaldo Mussolini wrote two articles in June 1930 in the Popolo d'Italia, vindicating the industriousness of the Italian migrant and asserting his right to work and to be treated with dignity.85 These articles, noted the British Embassy in Rome, 'caused the greatest impression in Australia. Italian labourers had felt that they were being supported',86 even if this support caused more damage than benefit. In fact, Mussolini in his articles did not limit himself to praising Italian labour, but made some derogatory remarks about the Australian workers.87 The Popolo d'Italia printed a cartoon in which Italian labour was described as the 'living branch' of a tree. symbolising Australia, while Australian labour was illustrated as the 'dead branch'.88 The insult was taken up by Smith's Weekly, which attacked the Fascist regime and the Italian immigrants in Australia in very harsh terms.89

The incident did not develop further, but was a reminder of the delicate relations between Italians and Australians during the Depression years. The effects of this great economic crisis were deeply felt by the migrants, and their plight was acknowledged by the Italian authorities, who tried to alleviate their sufferings through many assistance and welfare organisations. In August 1930 the consulate-general founded a Società Italiana di Beneficenza (Italian Welfare Society), whose aim was to collect money for the unemployed; in September 1930 three jobless Italians who had written personally

to Mussolini asking for assistance were repatriated by the Italian government; in May 1931 Father Mambrini opened in Sydney a branch of the Society of St Vincent de Paul to help the needy Italians in the community; in December 1932 the profits of the *Ballo del Littorio*, a celebration held during the previous month, were presented to the consul-general by the female branch of the Sydney *Fascio*, to be used for assistance purposes. All these associations and initiatives were complementing the already existing ones such as the welfare office opened in Melbourne by the local Fascist branch in October 1928.

Fascism in Australia consolidated its position between the years 1928 and 1932 also because its respectability in the eyes of Italian migrants was enhanced by three events which had a great impact on their minds.

The first one in order of time and importance was the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards Fascism: Although the regime and Italians in general had found since the early 1920s a strenuous admirer in the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, only after the Concordat did the Catholic hierarchy express its full support for the regime. Archbishop Duhig had done this already in February 1929,90 while the Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Kelly, returning from a visit to Italy, declared his boundless admiration for the thaumaturgical powers of the Duce.91 Yet it was only on the occasion of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Fascist regime in 1932 that an official contact between the Fascist authorities in Australia and the Apostolic Delegate for Australasia took place. On 17 September 1932, the newly appointed consul-general, Marquis Agostino Ferrante, visited Bartolomeo Cattaneo, the Apostolic Delegate, for the first time. 92 The Delegate in his turn officiated at a religious function and delivered a sermon which praised the marriage of the Church with Fascism.93 The consul-general returned the courtesy by having a party at his residence in honour of Cattaneo on occasion of the fourth anniversary of the signing of the Concordat.94

A second factor which increased the prestige of Fascism was the newspapers' constant reference to Italy's peace policy, to her disarmament proposals and to her historical friendship with Great Britain. The last point was hammered with particular insistence, 95 and Australians were encouraged to adopt a similar policy. 'Follow England', cried the *Italo-Australian*, 'should be Australia's watchword in this regard. It should inspire her to maintain the warmest friendship with a country which is eager to reciprocate'. 96

The third event was the fascistisation of the diplomatic representatives. As well as the upgrading of the status of its legations in this country. Rome carried out for the first time what Fascists liked to call 'the change of the guard', that is, the switching of consular personnel in order to infuse new spirit and create new situations favourable to the propagation of the cause. In September 1929 the vice-consul of Perth, Virgilio Lancellotti, the doyen of Fascists in Australia, was posted to Brazil and replaced by Renato Citarelli. Born in 1898, Citarelli had a splendid Fascist background. He had written for the Popolo d'Italia the history of the Fascist militia, then had been attached to the High Command of the militia, and left this position to take charge of the Press Office of the National Fascist Party in Rome. 97 Under his control, the Perth branch of the Fascist Party swelled to proportions which were unreal, because Citarelli wanted to have every Italian as a member of the Fascio.98 It was alleged that privately he was even sympathetic with Mistrorigo's ultra-Fascist articles.99 The posting in Perth proved to be a dead-end for such an ambitious young man as Citarelli, and he was transferred to Syria in July 1932, 1 a year of great changes for Italian consuls in Australia. In January a new consul, Enrico Anzilotti, was sent to Melbourne. A distinguished speaker, Oxford educated, Anzilotti proved himself an impeccable functionary, always ready to promote and defend the cause of his country and his regime. But the really important change which altered the political climate in the Italian community was the promotion of the consul-general. Grossardi, to New York.² Antonio Grossardi in his twelve years of office had represented his government with dignity and aplomb: a strong character, he bore the imprint of the people of the Emilia. Factious and anticlerical, Socialist by temperament and Fascist by circumstance, Grossardi never expressed himself for the regime in very warm terms, and when he manifested his sense of

admiration, it was more for Italy and the Italians than for the party which ruled the country.3 His successor was Marquis Agostino Ferrante, an experienced diplomat aged forty-seven who had served as consul for twenty-two years, the last ten in Boston and Philadelphia, and had married an American. The arrival of Ferrante marked a watershed in the history of Fascism in Australia. With him, the period of consolidation of Fascism in this country ended and the movement advanced from a stage of nationalism and cultural imperialism to a new period where the expansionist leanings of the regime were not expressed any longer in intellectual terms, but in the more earthy language of Italy's right to expand, of territorial aspirations, of 'a place in the sun'. Ferrante was only the expression of this new mood of Italian Fascism. He still used the old propaganda clichés, but the spirit, the motivation, were different. Moreover, his arrival was coincidental with the appearance on 19 March 1932, of a new Italian newspaper, Il Giornale Italiano, edited by Franco Battistessa, which would represent during the 1930s, to 10 June 1940, the major channel of Fascist propaganda in Australia.

Both events marked the birth of a new period in the history of Fascism and Italians in Australia, where the representatives of the regime and its local supporters interpreted the international events and the demands which Fascist Italy made upon other countries and upon her own citizens scattered around the world, in a more aggressive, demanding, totalitarian way. Fascism was approaching a new stage: that of imperialism.

Notes

- 1 See Renzo De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II. L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista. 1925-1929. Torino, 1968, p. 442. See also the article by E. Amicucci, editor of La Gazzetta del Popolo, reprinted in Italo-Australian, 17 March 1928.
- 2 Italo-Australian, 18 Feb. 1928.
- 3 AA, CRS A1, item 28/294, Prime Minister's Dept to Home and Territories, 26 April 1928.

4 Ibid. This instruction was criticised by the Sydney Daily Guardian; Italians, pointed out the paper, 'in proportion as they perfervidly cherish their Italian Fascism, the more they stand aloof from Australianism'; consequently 'no democracy receiving Italian Citizens can relish too much of "Evviva il Duce" '(Italo-Australian, 18 Feb. 1928).

5 AA, CRS A1, item 28/294, Prime Minister's Dept to Home and

Territories, 26 April 1928.

- 6 'They must avoid participation in the internal politics of the countries whose hospitality they enjoy (Article I, Section 2)'. This Article met strong oppositon from the Australian press. The West Australian deplored it 'if it means advice not to accept the full obligations and interests of citizenship' (Italo-Australian, 3 March 1928).
- 7 This subordination of the party to the state was unambiguously stated by the statute in Article 6: 'The essential task of the Fasci is that of the assistance of fellow-countrymen abroad. The Secretary of the Fascio shall carry out this task under the direction of the representative of the Fascist State (Consuls-General, Consuls and Vice-Consuls) who shall assist him in his work' and even more clearly in Article I, Section 5, which ordered Fascists to 'respect the representatives of Italy abroad and obey their commands and direction' (AA, CRS A1, item 28/294, Prime Minister's Dept to Home and Territories, 26 April 1928).

8 In a letter to the Secretary of the Home and Territories Dept dated 24 August 1927, the Secretary to the Attorney-General's Dept, Sir Robert Garran, raised the problem that 'the form of oath administered to members of the Italian Fascist groups in

Australia is as follows:

I swear to execute, without question, the orders of the Duce and to serve the cause of the Fascist revolution with all my

power and, if necessary, my blood'.

The Home and Territories Secretary, McLaren, discussed the matter with Sir Robert Garran in January 1928 and, as he reported, 'when I pointed out to him that an alien cannot secure naturalisation without renouncing his former allegiance, in addition to taking an oath of allegiance to the King, he agreed that nothing more could very well be done' (AA, CRS A1, item 28/294, Attorney-General's Dept to Home and Territories, 24 Aug. 1927).

9 AA, CRS A1, item 28/294, Prime Minister's Dept to Home and Territories, 26 April 1928.

10 Ibid., Dominions No. 241 to Australia, 8 May 1928.

11 They were regarded as 'a valuable means of propaganda. They represent, as it were, a 'bath of Italianity', the taking of which must be encouraged and extended as widely as possible' (ibid.).

12 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Nov. 1928; Italo-Australian, 24 Nov.

1928.

- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Pascale, Tra gli Italiani.
- 15 Ibid., p. 69.
- 16 Ibid., p. 139. In contrast to the praising of their national virtues and of the world's debt to Italian civilisation, the Fascists maintained a spiteful attitude towards the cultural heritage of other nations. In an article published in the *Popolo d'Italia* in July 1930, Mussolini's brother, Arnaldo, disdainfully disposed of the Australian culture tradition by bluntly remarking that 'Australian culture is nothing else but a second-rate product of British culture. Australia may have thousands of electric globes, but the spark which lights them up is given by the Italian genius of Marconi, from the harbour of Genoa' (ibid., pp. 210-11).
- 17 Ibid., p. 46.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 155-6.
- 19 AA, CRS A981, item Migration 48, Prime Minister's Dept to Dominions, 24 Aug. 1928. An External Affairs memorandum dated 20 November 1941, states that 'the net migration of Italians to Australia during 1928 was actually only 1,374 and for the following year, ninety' (AA, CRS A981, item Migration 48).
- 20 Ibid., 29 Sept. 1928.
- 21 As was the case in Sydney with Vicenzo Eolo Giuffre. V. E. Giuffre, interview, 22 Aug. 1971. See also *Italo-Australian*, 8 April 1933, which advertised a course begun by G. Luciano, former consular agent at Innisfail.
- 22 Italo-Australian, 13 July 1929. Bianchi was a close associate of Franco Battistessa in India and also in Australia. For his biography, see Vade Mecum. Illustrated Annual of the Giornale Italiano, 30 June 1936, pp. 100-1.
- 23 Italo-Australian, 5 Nov. 1932 and 14 Jan. 1933.
- 24 Ibid., 7 Nov. 1931; 5 Nov. 1932; 18 March 1933; 30 Nov. 1929; 28 May 1932; 3 Dec. 1932; 11 June 1932; 10 June 1933; 4 May 1929 and 2 May 1931.
- 25 Ibid., 11 April 1931.
- 26 Ibid., 21 June 1930. On the politicising of sport, see also R. De Felice, Mussolini il duce I. Gli anni del consenso. 1929-1936. Torino, 1974, p. 101.
- 27 The Sydney Daily Guardian on 19 January 1929, complained that 'Australia has observed the... outrageous spirit of cockahoop self-importance in the Italian Consuls Carosi in Melbourne and San Marzano in Brisbane issuing their truculent messages to State Governments. A more temperate ruler would keep in check... those loquacious Consuls in whom Italian nationalism has not its watchdogs, but rather its terriers, always ready to yap'.
- 28 Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Nov. 1928.
- 29 Italo-Australian, 13 Oct. 1928.

30 He added that 'in name of my Government, I therefore ask for full satisfaction for my countrymen. My Government is not disposed to tolerate failure to protect Italians resident in Australia' (Italo-Australian, 3 Nov. 1928).

31 Italo-Australian, 17 Nov. 1928.

32 Ibid., 29 Dec. 1928; Sydney Morning Herald, 1 Jan. 1929.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

- 35 Ibid., 12 Jan. 1929.
- 36 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 Jan. and 5 Jan. 1929.
- 37 Italo-Australian, 28 June 1930. The culprit of the second offence was never found despite the fact that the Queensland government had offered a reward of £200 to any person who could supply information leading to the capture of the offender (Queensland Government Gazette, 1930, Vol. I, p. 2121). One of the reasons was that 'owing to the high feeling existing in Innisfail at the time between various industrial, racial and political organisations and groups - such as the British Preference League, the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia, the Australian Workers Union, the Italian Club, the Queensland Canegrowers Association, the Italian Fascists and the Italian anti-Fascists - great difficulty was experienced by the police in obtaining information. Special police officers were sent to investigate the matter and their investigations were continued until it was established beyond reasonable doubt that the matter would never be satisfactorily solved' (T.P. Fry, 'The Italian consular incidents in North Queensland', The Australian and New Zealand Society of International Law - Proceedings, Melbourne, 1935, Vol. I. p. 92).
- 38 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 Sept. 1930.

39 Italo-Australian, 20 Sept. 1930.

40 On the powers, privileges, immunities and legal status of the Italian consuls in Australia, with regard to the Innisfail incidents, see Fry, 'The Italian consular incidents'. Interesting are his observations that while in practice the Italian consuls held wider political powers in Australia, 'to the Government of which no Italian diplomatic representative is accredited, than in countries to which Italy sends both consular and diplomatic representatives' (p. 97), in theory they had no such powers. Under international law, 'a Consul is not accredited to a Government; he is merely instructed by his own Government to perform, with the permission of another Government, certain functions in the territory of the latter' (p. 96); therefore Italian Consuls could 'request information, initiate proceedings [in the Courtsl, make representations, or even suggest courses of action', but they could not 'present formal demands, enter into formal negotiations or agree to settlements' (p. 97). According to

Fry, 'it would seem that even the Consul-General would likewise be unable to make such a formal demand(s) upon the Commonwealth Government' (p. 97).

- 41 Italo-Australian, 3 Nov. 1928.
- 42 Ibid. 26 Jan. 1929 and 2 Nov. 1929.
- 43 On this, see the study by Philip V. Cannistraro, La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media. Bari. 1975.
- 44 Grossardi admitted that the content of the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia was 'emanating from this Consulate-General' (AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, Grossardi to External Affairs, 12 Nov. 1931).
- 45 After 1928 this newspaper intensified the pace of its propaganda in favour of Fascism. In addition to items of information on Italian politics and the Italian Fascist Party, the *Italo-Australian* carried on in its pages a thorough campaign of education in Fascist principles and policies; a few examples of it are the articles on 'Fascist policy and principles' (11 May 1929); on 'Mussolini's phenomenal activity' (18 May 1929); on 'The Fascist rule' (8 June 1929); on 'Fascism' (3 Aug. 1929); on 'The achievements of Fascism' (9 Nov. 1929); on 'Italy under Fascism' (12 July 1930); on 'A tribute to Fascism' (27 Sept. 1930); on 'A Mussolini speech' (8 Nov. 1930); on 'Assassination plot' (11 June 1932); on 'A simple man' (8 Oct. 1932).
- 46 Italo-Australian, 23 Jan. 1932.
- 47 Ibid., 28 Nov. 1931.
- 48 AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, Grossardi to External Affairs, 12 Nov. 1931.
- 49 Ibid., List of newspapers in foreign languages.
- 50 Ibid., External Affairs Opinion No. 9.
- 51 Ibid., O'Dea and O'Dea to Prime Minister's Dept. 24 April 1929.
- 52 Ibid., External Affairs Opinion No. 9; also External Affairs to O'Dea and O'Dea, 3 Oct. 1929.
- 53 Ibid., Mistrorigo to Scullin, 22 May 1931.
- 54 Ibid., CIB to Prime Minister's Dept. 23 July 1931.
- 55 Ibid., Prime Minister's Dept to Mistrorigo, 15 Oct. 1931.
- 56 Ibid., Grossardi to Prime Minister's Dept, 12 Nov. 1931. This statement contrasts with Mistrorigo's assertion that 'the paper ... would be published with the full approval of the Royal Italian Vice-Consul of W.A., Cavaliere Citarelli' (AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, Mistrorigo to Scullin, 22 May 1931). Obviously Mistrorigo was lying in order to be granted permission to publish, or the vice-consul maintained an ambiguous attitude towards him.
- 57 The reasons for Mistrorigo's extreme Fascist tendencies were later investigated by the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, which came out with an interesting report that is worth quoting at length since it pinpoints the reasons behind the behaviour of some ultra-Fascist Italians in Australia: 'About seven years ago,

Mistrorigo had a pharmacy in Rome. About this time the Fascists were taking active measure against the Communists. and I am informed Mistrorigo was deemed to be a Communist and his shop suspected of being a meeting place of Communists. One evening a number of revolver bullets were fired through the door of his shop. My informant, who then lived in the same locality, told me that the local Fascists suspected that a Communist meeting was taking place in the shop and indicated their disapproval by a volley through the door. It was also suggested that Mistrorigo migrated to Australia because it was being made too hot for him in Rome . . . As regards Mistrorigo's starting, financing and conducting the paper La Stampa Italiana, its decidedly pro-Fascist policy, the publication of constant and full reports of local Fascist activities, the eulogistic references so frequently made to the Vice-Consul and his secretary - the theory has been advanced by an intelligent Italian that Mistrorigo is trying to rehabilitate himself in the eves of the Fascists in order to be able to return to Rome under favourable auspices. His wife recently left Australia for Italy. The opinion was further expressed that Mistrorigo would welcome being deported, especially over any articles in his paper ostensibly in defence of Italian National ideals, if actually insulting to the Empire under whose flag so many of his countrymen earn comfortable livings and, in fact, accumulate competencies upon which to retire to their native land' (AA, CRS) A445, item 232/4/12, Jones to McLaren, 8 July 1932).

58 AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, CIB Perth to CIB Canberra, 7 June 1932.

The most incriminating passage of the article read as follows: 59 'We continue to observe in Australia the same phenomenon which flourishes in all lands where the English flag flies: that is, hatred, egoism, immorality, a domineering spirit, vulgar insult, with the difference that here, not being able to take a whip and thrash the foreigner who is working and enriching their land. they have established ridiculous laws and factions in order to cut the ground under the feet of those who are trying with their toil to earn an honest and comfortable living. Hatred becomes fanaticism in cases where our workmen decisively surpass the productive ability of the British. Rude and vulgar propaganda against the foreigner grows and soars gloriously where they come into collision with the iron wills of our fellow-countrymen. When they can no longer fight, then the true Anglo-Saxon politeness blossoms in the columns of their newspapers in which for courteous controversy is substituted shamless calumny, for frank and free discussion, vulgar and foolish insult; such as is the boasted British politeness' (From Professor Murdoch's translation for the CIB in AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, CIB. Canberra, to Prime Minister's Dept. 5 July 1932).

- 60 AA, CRS A432, item 32/01059, 23 June 1932. See also Sunday Times, Perth, 26 June 1932.
- 61 AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12. CIB Perth to CIB Canberra, 28 June 1932.
- 62 Ibid., Jones to Prime Minister's Dept, 5 July 1932.
- 63 Ibid., Attorney-General's Opinion, 25 Aug. 1932; also Prime Minister's Dept to Interior, 30 Aug. 1932.
- 64 Ibid., Interior to External Affairs, 19 Sept. 1932.
- 65 Ibid., Interior to External Affairs, 5 Oct. 1932. See also Italo-Australian. 1 Oct. and 8 Oct 1932.
- 66 Commonwealth Gazette, No. 83 of 24 Nov. 1932.
- 67 Italo-Australian, 24 Nov. 1928.
- 68 Ibid., 2 March 1929. The correspondent of the *Italo-Australian*, obviously conveying the feeling of the majority of Italians present, remarked that 'a priest who has also been an officer in war, who has served his Fatherland with faith and has been mutilated, cannot neglect patriotism and take care exclusively of religious matters. Fatherland and Religion are to him only one thing, which cannot be separated' (ibid.).
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 He was quite aware of his pre-eminent role in promoting Fascism in Australia which he considered 'as a movement arising out of the traditional classic culture of the Italian people'; looking back at his activities in the 1920s and 1930s, he proudly declared in October 1940 that 'no other citizen, more than myself, endeavoured to establish a closer and better understanding and knowledge between the two countries' (AA, Series 13, P242, item Q30565, A. Baccarini, Statutory Declaration, 31 Oct. 1940).
- 71 In 1927 Mussolini stated that the duties of the Dante Alighieri Society, 'one of our dearest and most glorious institutions, are today and in the future greater than those of yesterday' (*Italian Bulletin of Australia*, 16 April 1927, p. 24).
- 72 See, for instance, his lectures on 'A creative synthesis: Fascismo', given on 23 November 1932, at the Dante Alighieri Society in Sydney (Italian Bulletin of Australia, November 1932, p. 10), and on 'Fascism and Communism', given on 5 April, 1933 at the Labor Club of the University of Sydney (Italo-Australian, 8 April 1933).
- 73 Italo-Australian, 8 Dec. 1928.
- 74 Ibid., 6 July 1929; 20 July 1929; 26 Oct. 1929; 30 Aug. 1930.
- 75 Ibid., 21 Feb. 1931.
- 76 R. De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II. L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista. 1925-1929. Torino, 1968, pp. 370-1.
- 77 See, for instance, Italo-Australian, 1 Oct. 1932.
- 78 Ibid., 29 Oct. 1932.
- 79 Eric Campbell, The Rallying Point, Melbourne, 1965, p. 131.
- 80 Italian Bulletin of Commerce, November 1932, p. 13.

- 81 The Labor Daily alleged that 'the landing permits are issued by the Italian Consul-General in Australia', and that Italians 'are admitted only if hallmarked by the Italian Government's assurance to the local Consul-General that they are pro-Fascist'; consequently 'this ensures Italians in Australia being of only one brand pro Mussolini' (Labor Daily, 20 Sept. 1932).
- 82 Italo-Australian, 6 April 1929.
- 83 Ibid., 14 June 1930.
- 84 Grossardi, quoted in Pascale, *Tra gli Italiani*, p. 201. The number of Italian canecutters in relation to the number of workers of Australian, British and other nationalities was not large: in the Innisfail district, for instance, where Italians were most numerous, from a total of 303 canecutters, 102 were Italian, 105 Australian and ninety-six of other nationalities (ibid., p. 199).
- 85 The articles were entitled 'Egoismi d'oltre mare' (Overseas selfishness) and 'Difesa del lavoro Italiano' (Defence of Italian labour). See their full text in: Pascale, *Tra gli Italiani*, pp. 203-13. Also, *Italo-Australian*, 28 July 1930.
- 86 AA, CRS A981, item Migration 48, British High Commissioner to Prime Minister of Australia, 3 July 1930.
- 87 Pascale, Tra gli Italiani, p. 212.
- 88 AA, CRS A981, item Migration 48, British High Commissioner to Prime Minister of Australia, 3 July 1930.
- 89 Smith's Weekly, 6 Sept. 1930.
- 90 Ibid., 2 Feb. 1929.
- 91 Ibid., 18 Oct. 1930.
- 92 Ibid., 24 Sept. 1932. The previous consul-general, Grossardi, did not get along well with the representatives of the Church, being by tradition and temperament a staunch anti-clerical (Napoleone Costantino, interview, 17 May 1972).
- 93 Italo-Australian, 5 Nov. 1932.
- 94 Ibid., 18 Feb. 1933.
- 95 Ibid., 24 Oct. 1931; 5 March 1932; 17 Dec. 1932.
- 96 Ibid., 14 Jan. 1933 and 28 Jan. 1933.
- 97 Italian Bulletin of Australia, Oct. 1929, p. 11.
- 98 Costantino, interview.
- 99 See CIB Report dated 8 July 1932 in AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12.
 - 1 Italo-Australian, 2 July 1932. He was succeeded by Napoleone Costantino.
 - 2 Ibid., 25 June 1932.
- 3 In 1931, on his return after a brief visit to Italy, all that he could say was that 'Italy in the last nine years has experienced tremendous achievements and enormous changes which must modify world opinion of her' (Italo-Australian, 22 Aug. 1931). Evidence that his allegiance lay more towards the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs than towards Fascism is found in

the fact that after 1945 he reverted to his Socialist and anticlerical beliefs, and that he fell into disgrace with the ruling Christian-Democrat government when, as Minister in Lisbon, he treated harshly some Italian priests who, unfortunately for him, had powerful connections in the government (Costantino, interview.).

3 Dissident Fascism

... we prefer to lose our Party membership card than our faith.

(Franco Battistessa, 10 November 1928)

During the second half of the 1920s some Italians who had taken an active part in the Fascist struggle for power before 1922 by serving in the para-military formations of the squadristi, migrated to Australia. Their political background was varied; a few had been members of the Nationalist movement during the years preceding Word War I; others had joined the Fascist movement during the difficult years of 1919 and 1920; some had become members of the Partito Nazionale Fascista when the movement had been transformed by Mussolini into a party in November 1921.

They regretted now that the daring and anti-conformist Fascism of those times had been replaced by its dull, law-and-order abiding new version. The reasons which compelled them to emigrate to Australia were many, the most important ones being economic necessity, spirit of adventure, and disappointment with the legalitarian outcome of the Fascist Revolution. Many believed that the old forces of the

Establishment, in an attempt to maintain their predominant role in Italian politics and to survive under the new regime, had cast aside their liberal ideology and were now trying to influence Fascism and to empty it of its revolutionary content. If these forces were to succeed, the old state would survive within the shell of the new Fascist state, and Fascism would lose its dynamic spirit. These Fascists 'of the first hour' in Australia, as indeed Farinacci and his followers in Italy, 1 saw in this plan a betraval of the Fascist Revolution. They could not accept the fact that the age of squadrism had ended and that the Italian government was not looking favourably at those who were preaching unrest and permanent revolution at the time when it was attempting to restore order within Italy and to create abroad an image of lawfulness and respectability. Once abroad, they brought their dissent into the Fascist organisations in their new country, thus transferring the political unrest within Fascism from Italy to the overseas branches of the party.2

Although dissident Fascists had been arriving in Australia since 1925, it was only in 1928 that they formed a faction in Sydney. The reason they became active so late was twofold. The rising anti-Fascism amongst migrants in 1926-27 revived in the dissidents the wish to use again the violent means against their opponents which had been so successful in 1921-22. Also, the *squadristi* who migrated to Australia in 1927-28 were much more outspoken and militant than their forerunners, because they had witnessed and even taken part in the factional in-fighting between *sansepolristi* and conservatives which had beset Fascism in Italy. Furthermore, they were spurred into action by the arrival in Sydney, at the beginning of 1928, of Battistessa.

Franco Battistessa was born at Colico, on Lake Como in 1885. He studied at Sondrio and at the age of twelve was sent to England to study at Colebrook College at Bognor Regis, where he remained for five years. Later he lived for one year at Lugano (Switzerland) and for another year at Cannes and Juan-les-Pins (France). When he returned to Italy he was one of the first to join the Associazione Nazionalista in 1910, and found himself involved in those activities aimed at helping, morally and materially, Italian irredentism in the provinces

still under Austrian domination. In these years he began his activity as a journalist. With C. Chiavolini, later Mussolini's private secretary, and Arturo Rossato, future columnist of the *Popolo d'Italia*, Battistessa founded the *Associazione Nazionale dei Giovani Scrittori Italiani* (National Association of Young Italian Writers), becoming its secretary. He then became editor of the weekly *Il Pensiero Giovanile* and correspondent of *L'Orizzonte* of Messina.

As early as July 1911 he showed his intolerance of a doctrinaire and literary nationalism and his preference for a more dynamic, warlike attitude: during that month he, with two other friends, ventured into the Socialist Trades Hall of Milan where an anti-war rally against the war in Libya was being held, to break up the meeting and to shout 'Long live war!' In 1913 Battistessa was sent by an Italian textile firm to manage its agency in Bombay. He remained in India for six vears. When in 1919 he returned to Italy for a holiday, he immediately joined the Fasci di combattimento and became commander of one of the squads, the 'Randaccio', subsequently called by Mussolini 'l'Intrepida' (the Intrepid One). After a brief return to India, he was back in Italy early in 1921 and with his squad escorted Mussolini from Milan to Rome when the Duce was elected Deputy to the Parliament. On 22 March 1921, Battistessa led his squad into the Socialist district of Milan called Greco Milanese, where a bloody confrontation with the anti-Fascists took place and a young squadrist. Aldo Sette, was shot dead. In January 1922, Battistessa was appointed secretary of the association La Guardia al Brennero (The Guard on the Brenner). This body had been created, under the patronage of Mussolini, by the leader of the Futurist movement, F. T. Marinetti, to combat the increasing German nationalism in the Alto Adige region.3 After Fascism came to power, Battistessa continued in his journalistic activity, corresponding for the newspapers Corriere Fascista, Prode Anselmo, Corriere dell'Alto Adige and the magazines Il 1919 and the Rivista Illustrata Italiana. In 1926 he returned to India, where he remained for two years founding in Bombay the first Italian newspaper in India, L'Italiano, and becoming political secretary of the Fascist branch.⁴ In 1928 Battistessa emigrated to Australia. When he arrived in Sydney, his fluency in English and Italian, his culture, his political past, contributed to put him at the fore of the political life of the community.

The dissident fascists were encouraged in their attitude by three new developments. Throughout 1927 the young and recently appointed consuls in Australia adopted the policy of bolstering the sagging nationalism of Italians by seeking the widest publicity for their statements in support of Fascism. Also, the strong stand taken by the Fascist government at this time with regard to the migrants' poor working and sociocultural conditions received the overwhelming support of most Italians. It was felt, as the Italo-Australian put it, that 'it was now derogatory to the dignity of Italy that her citizens should go seeking work haphazardly in other countries of the world'.5 Moreover, the new Secretary-General of the Fasci Abroad, Piero Parini, took a more militant line than his predecessor and shortly after the issuing of the new Statute of the Fasci Abroad fanned the flame of dissident Fascism in Australia by declaring that migrants in foreign countries must remain 'exasperatingly Italian' and that the process of fascistizzazione of the diplomatic service must be completed as soon as possible.6

When, in January 1928, the Italian government transferred its consulate-general from Melbourne to Sydney, so that its representative could be closer to the new Federal Capital, Canberra and at the same time promoted the Sydney viceconsul, Mario Carosi, to consul, many militant Fascists thought that Parini's line was also the government's, and that as a result at last the Italian officials would be fascistizzati even in Australia. They hoped that Rome would recall the then consul-general, Grossardi, and replace him with a young Fascist diplomat. Their assumption that Mussolini would favour a 'change of the guard' was strengthened by an article, written by Dino Grandi in Il Legionario, official organ of the National Fascist Party Abroad, in which the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs stated that the consul was not only the main agent of Italian political, economic and cultural expansion, but also the pioneer of the new Fascist civilisation, the principal propagandist of its doctrine.7

In March 1928 the Fascists who had always objected to the

leadership of the consul-general were prompted into action. At the beginning of that month they sent around to their comrades in Sydney a petition, which they planned to forward to the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, asking that the Sydney consul, Carosi, be not posted to another assignment, but kept there and even promoted to the highest diplomatic position in Australia. First-hour Fascists, claimed the promoters of the petition, had been appointed consuls-general everywhere except in Australia; it would be proper, therefore, that the new consulate-general in Sydney should be opened by a new consulgeneral in possession of the Fascist prerequisites demanded by the regime.⁸

The petition collected 200 signatures,9 a remarkable figure if one considers that the total membership of the Sydney Fascio was 200.10 This open act of censure against Grossardi's tenure of office betrayed those people who resented the leadership of one whom they considered as the survivor of a world which they had fought and destroyed. When the authorities knew about it, they acted at once. The president of the Sydney Fascio. Napoleone Costantino, ordered the immediate destruction of the 200 signatures and warned the supporters of the petition against plotting further dissident action. Also, under direct orders from Grossardi, the Sydney Fascists were hastily summoned and, in the presence of Consul Carosi, ordered to vote in favour of a motion supporting the conduct of all consuls in Australia, with no exception. Only twenty-five Fascists were present at this meeting.

These events created a new, deeper rift which divided the Italian community further, and the consul-general's swift and resolute intervention contributed to the polarisation of popular feeling. In the meantime, the *Italo-Australian* voiced in its pages the opposition of a section of the community to Grossardi's lukewarm Fascism by commenting in one of its editorials that the majority of Italians in Sydney approved of the petition, and by publishing letters from readers condemning the attitude of the consul-general.

Grossardi entered the polemic personally by writing a letter to the owner of the *Italo-Australian*, Lubrano, accusing his editor, Eustacchio Del Pin, of behaving in his private life in a manner unworthy of a Fascist. Del Pin retorted by reminding the consul-general that only of late had he become a member of those Fascist branches in Victoria which he, Del Pin, had founded already in 1925.

Thus Del Pin touched on one of the important points of contrast between official Fascism and dissident Fascists in Australia: the latter accused some of the consular and party representatives of being opportunists who had sided with the enemies of Fascism between 1919 and 1922 and had joined the victorious movement only when they saw that their careers would be imperilled if they did not become members of the party and did not pay lip service to the new order. These people, in the opinion of the dissident fascists, could not command the allegiance of the true fascists, of people who had been with Mussolini since the early days of Via Paolo del Cannobio: as Battistessa pointed out, referring to the secretary of the Sydney Fascio. Mario Melano, 'he who has deceitfully gained admittance to Fascism by the back door, has one duty only: to keep quiet in order to be forgiven'. Even if their past could be forgiven, their present methods of guiding the colony could not be accepted; ideas could not be imposed by force, obedience could not be obtained by means of threats. The authoritarianism of official Fascism was the second most important bone of contention between the two factions: many squadrists, who had served in the arditi during World War I or even had an Anarchist background, resented strongly the discipline and the unquestioning obedience which Rome was trying to impose. 11

When Battistessa joined the staff of the Italo-Australian, he shared these feelings with many Fascists discontented with the consular authorities; also, by virtue of his background, he became immediately the leader of the movement of protest against official Fascism in Australia. In an article on 26 May 1928, appealing for harmony in the community, Battistessa laid down two postulates which, according to him, were essential to the success of Fascism among the migrants. The Fascist branches must be absolutely free from any interference by the representatives of the Italian government, interference which could be dictated by interests that did not always coincide with those of the Fascist party or were compatible with the ideals of the Fascist Revolution. Also, the Fasci had

to be run in an open fashion, by discussing the issues and without imposing sanctions upon the dissenters.

It was to be expected that such postulates would put the author and his supporters in direct conflict with official Fascism since they ran contrary to the 1926 Statute of the Fasci Abroad and to its 1928 revised version. The statute ruled that a Fascist branch could not be, even de facto, independent from the consul-general's authority, because he was the highest party as well as government representative in Australia; nor were the branches allowed to discuss their problems openly because of their delicate political nature. The demands for the fascistizzazione of the diplomatic service, for a less hierarchical and more participatory party structure, for the independence of the party from the state and for the rejection of secrecy as a means of conducting the affairs of the Fascio, marked the exact line of division between dissident Fascism and the authorities.

The dissent was restricted to a vocal minority of approximately thirty-five Fascists who enjoyed the tacit support of a sizeable number of party members. ¹² The other members passively witnessed the conflict, abiding by the party regulations without inner conviction. In this sense they remained loyal to the authorities, but the value of their allegiance was questionable. As Del Pin commented appropriately:

unfortunately in the life of a colony which is very far from the Fatherland . . . there are people who obey in good faith, others who obey for peace sake, or because they are in need . . . and people who obey for interest, or who obey only in part, and people who . . . pretend to obey. Who are the rebels, then? Nobody. 13

Some dissident Fascists judged the situation to be so serious and beyond any possibility of rapprochement either with the diplomats in Australia or with official Fascism in Rome that they considered forming an Australian Branch of Dissident Fascists. Only the political perspective, intelligence and authority of Battistessa succeeded in avoiding, for the moment, a dramatic confrontation. When the dispute was at its worst, he (perhaps in order to bring the authorities to a position of compromise) made public the fact that the old

Fascists had asked for his advice on the opportuneness of such an initiative, but that he had discouraged them and had exhorted them to accept discipline.14 In reality, Battistessa opposed the formation of a breakaway movement because he believed that the present situation was temporary and was to a large extent the product of the ineptitude of the men at the head of the movement in Australia. In time such men would go and then the control of the community would fall inevitably into the hands of the rightful guardians of the Revolution, the true Fascists of the first hour. A secession would weaken the movement irretrievably, thus endangering the cause of Fascism among Italians in Australia. Yet Battistessa's role as moderator clashed with his inclination for the personal challenge, for the daring squadrist feat, for the idealistic condemnation of injustice, with no consideration for personal consequences. The Fascist motto was 'To dare, not to plot'. and Battistessa thought that instead of forming dissident Fascist branches and of dividing the community further, it was the duty of the true Fascist, of the squadrist, to denounce personally, directly, publicly, the opportunists, the Fascists for convenience. As he said in 1928:

injustice is fought openly, not by means of arbitrary actions... If the authorities are inept or guilty they must be fought on their own ground, not in the ambush of secessionist or rebellious movements, repulsive to the manly and loyal Fascists. 15

Ironically, the episode which was meant to mark the beginning of this open action policy and which highlighted the dissident Fascists' opposition to the conduct of Fascist officialdom in Australia was the rather pathetic and absurd Paddington Town Hall incident on 30 May 1928. That night, while the Italian community in Sydney was assembled in the Paddington Town Hall to celebrate with a banquet the transfer of the consulate-general from Melbourne to Sydney and the arrival of Grossardi, Franco Battistessa, in the uniform of commander of the punitive squad 'Randaccio', and two other squadrists, Ligustri and Borghetti, stormed into the hall interrupting the ceremony. After having given the Fascist salute, in the silence that ensued, Battistessa, on behalf of the

old blackshirts, charged Grossardi with being unworthy of the position he was occupying, since he was not defending the interests of Fascism but instead was gorging himself and dancing in a moment of national disaster, when General Nobile, together with seventeen other Italian heroes, was missing over the North Pole in an airship. In the pandemonium which followed, some women fainted, the waiters quickly collected the knives from the tables, the police were called in and Grossardi angrily promised Battistessa that his insults to the authority of the consul-general would bear grave consequences for him. To increase the tension, a few days after the incident some dozen Fascist dissidents declared their solidarity with the rebels. To

Thereafter the pace of events quickened. Battistessa received from Rome notice of his expulsion from the party while the Sydney Fascist branch expelled Ligustri and Borghetti for their part in the Paddington Town Hall incident. Another dissident, Fortunato Veller, supported publicly the three expelled and asked for the same punishment. He was satisfied almost immediately: Mario Melano explained the expulsion by saying that Veller was unworthy to associate with other Fascists loyal to the authorities. At the same time the secretary of the Melbourne Fascio, Pietro Del Mastro, attacked Battistessa in the party's newspaper Il Littorio, while Melano in Sydney went further by accusing the dissidents of being 'dead weights, people to purge . . . evil and ambitious, meddlesome . . . enemies of Fascism' and warned Italians not to frequent their company.

These violent attacks were evidence of the authorities' deep concern for the fact that the dissidents found some encouragement in the community, and that people were demanding Rome's intervention to oust the pseudo-Fascists from their positions of power.²² But the revolt was doomed to failure: the consular authorities had the support of the Italian government and of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, and nothing could persuade them to accept a compromise or even to leave the dissidents a way to save face. Between 1925 and 1928 Mussolini struck at those intransigent Fascists who represented the most serious and immediate threat to his authority and who believed that the abandonment of the

violent and illegal means used during 1921-22 would be tantamount to a moral demobilisation. To tolerate further their opposition within the party would have put at great risk the policy of conservatism and moderation which, at that stage, was essential to Mussolini for the consolidation of his regime.²³

Therefore Battistessa and his followers were left with no alternative but to persist in their unreconciled attitude. In vain Battistessa solicited Virgilio Lancellotti for his support and protested against the inertness of the Melbourne Fascists when the latter were confronted with increased anti-fascist activities; in vain he accused the Sydney Fascio of lacking political initiative and blasted his powerful opponents from the columns of the Italo-Australian, warning them that 'it is not Fascism that must ... adapt to the times, but it is you who must... become Fascists'. A few months after the signing of the petition, the consuls had succeeded in turning the tide and in slowly isolating the dissidents politically. Battistessa still tried to put up a last ditch defence by playing on the consuls' allegedly varying degrees of allegiance to Fascism. He constantly praised the behaviour of the consul in Melbourne. Carosi, the ardito di guerra, the young Fascist who did not miss any opportunity to defend and to propagate Fascism, and compared it with Grossardi's reticence.

Although afraid of supporting the dissidents in public, many fascists, by now intimidated by the consuls, believed that there was some truth in Battistessa's charges. Their belief was strengthened when, on the anniversary of the March on Rome. Carosi invited every Italian in Melbourne to take part in the celebrations while Grossardi in Sydney issued a few printed invitations to his personal friends to come on board the vessel Maria Cristina. 24 The Sydney celebration sparked a new series of incidents. It was learnt that the consul-general had invited very few to the ship because he suspected that the dissidents would disrupt a public meeting thus causing him embarrassment, particularly in view of the fact that Battistessa and other dissidents had formed La Squadraccia, a group modelled on the punitive squads of the squadristi, with intent to make life difficult for the consul-general.25 Yet some dissidents, among whom was Eustacchio Del Pin, a war invalid and much decorated ex-serviceman, tried to go on board uninvited but they were barred access to the ship by the branch secretary, Melano.²⁶

Again there was a public outcry, led by the Italo-Australian, and other appeals to purge Grossardi were sent to Rome.²⁷ Instead, Parini sent the official confirmation of the expulsion from the party of six dissidents involved in the Paddington Town Hall affair. While Battistessa accepted the verdict philosophically and told his readers that he preferred to lose his party membership card rather than his faith,28 other dissidents did not take it so meekly. Thirty-five of them. having also been excluded from the ceremony on the Maria Cristina, celebrated the March on Rome by parading through the streets of Surry Hills and singing Giovinezza.29 Others formed a branch of the Returned Servicemen, in open defiance of the authorities, and appointed Ligustri as its secretary.³⁰ Another group of dissidents organised itself into association of old Fascists called La Vecchia Guardia Fascista (The Old Fascist Guard). Ligustri, in an attempt to muster support, also organised a picnic and controversially invited to it all Italians without distinction.31 These moves did not worry Grossardi unduly; he knew that they were doomed to failure because of the lack of determination in many dissidents and of the official excommunication imparted by Rome.

Instead, he was most concerned by the stream of anticonsular propaganda which poured out of the pages of the Italo-Australian. As this newspaper had been behind the revolt of the dissidents in March and the Paddington Town Hall incident, Grossardi decided that its influence should be checked and to that purpose founded Il Corriere degli Italiani in Australia. Although all issues have been lost, an early mention of it is made in the Italo-Australian on 9 June 1928. The newspaper was backed financially by wealthy Italian businessmen, one of whom, Bartolomeo Callose, became its first editor, as well as by public subscriptions. Its political aims must have been quite obvious, to the point that the Italo-Australian on 8 December 1928 protested that: 'the Corriere does not represent the interests of the organisations in the colony, but of those who, with other people's money, prefer to fight the newspaper Italo-Australian.

The newspaper was launched with much publicity by the consul-general, who took that opportunity to defend his work and to condemn, yet again, the activities of the Fascist dissidents. In an important interview with the Daily Guardian, he stated categorically that: 'the official organ of the Italian community is the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia, which is the authorised organ of all recognised Italian associations in this country,' while the 'Italo-Australian newspaper does not represent the Italian community'32 but was making capital out of a regrettable situation caused by a small group of dissidents. In order to dispel any doubts in the minds of Italians and Australians that he was in full control of the situation and that the challenge to his authority was coming from a lunatic fringe, he explained to them that there was: 'no condition of a "social war" among Italians in Australia or Sydney. But, a handful of troublesome elements, who have been relegated to the background, are actuated by their personal rancour'. 33 Furthermore, concluded Grossardi:

the fact that I have remained Consul-General in Australia for nine years is in itself sufficient evidence that I have gained, in my consulate, the confidence of my Government and of the Italian community in Australia.³⁴

By the end of 1928 Grossardi had won the battle against Fascist dissenters and had intervened successfully in limiting the influence of the *Italo-Australian*. In fact, upon his advice to ban the newspaper, ³⁵ on 5 January 1929, the PNF informed its overseas members, by means of *Il Legionario*, that: 'the Secretary of the Fascist Party gives notice that the Sydney periodical *Italo-Australian* is not a Fascist journal. Its attitude decidedly does not conform with the Party's policy'. ³⁶ The London *Times* reported that the Italian Foreign Office declined to comment beyond the statement printed in the *Legionario*; ³⁷ it was nevertheless the general impression that Rome was forbidding the Fascists to read the *Italo-Australian*. The position assumed against the Sydney weekly was in line with the new restriction upon the freedom of the press which had been introduced in Italy at the end of 1927. ³⁸

During 1928 Fascism hit hard, even in Australia, at its opponents inside as well as outside the party, and began

imposing a forced consensus for the policies of the Fascist government, an imposition which became institutionalised with the consolidation of the regime. By the end of the year the problem of having to deal with the revolutionaries once the revolution had been accomplished was solved with the victory of the state over the party, although the two souls of Fascism, which De Felice calls Fascism-Movement and Fascism-Regime, continued to co-exist in Italian political life until the demise of this ideology.³⁹

The dissenters, in Australia as indeed in Italy, after being relegated for a few years to a political limbo, found their way back into the party during the 1930s. Many of them, such as Battistessa, although they became prominent again in local politics, looked back with regret to the days when Fascism meant more than the occasional dinner to celebrate a national festivity, the collective singing of *Giovinezza*, the wearing of the black shirt and the Roman salute to the authorities. They still dreamt of a society in which Fascism would be a living reality, a guide to the daily life of all Italians, and not an amorphous set of rules, similar to an old flag which, as Battistessa bitterly remarked, 'is exposed, faded and limp, only on important occasions, at country fairs, more for the sake of tradition than for love'.⁴⁰

Their halcyon days were over: another revolution had been betrayed when, once again, the apparatus had prevailed over the individual.

Notes

On the history of Fascist dissidents in Italy, see Renzo De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II. L'organizzazione dello Stato Fascista, 1925-1929, Torino, 1968, chap. 2. The Australian government had been briefed about the dissent within the Italian Fascist Party by its unofficial representative in Italy, Major-General G. Ramaciotti. In this First Report dated 30 June 1925, Ramaciotti reported that 'Fascismo is strongly predominant, but its difficulties are not diminishing. Party discipline is irksome to many "legionaries" and the return to normal government desired by Mussolini is retarded by those of his followers who will not desist from taking the law into their own hands or who have private axes to grind' (AA, CRS A981, item Italy 28 pt II, Ramaciotti, First Report, 30 June 1925).

66 Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia

- 2 Felice Rando, interview, 7 Sept. 1971.
- 3 Italo-Australian, 10 Aug. 1929; Vade Mecum, 30 June 1936, p. 102.
- 4 Vade Mecum, 30 June 1936.
- 5 Italo-Australian, 14 Jan. 1928.
- 6 Ibid., 25 Feb. 1928.
- 7 Ibid., 17 March 1928.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 24 March 1928.
- 11 See letter in Italo-Australian, 26 May 1928.
- 12 Ibid., 16 June 1928.
- 13 Ibid., 19 May 1928.
- 14 Ibid., 26 May and 9 June 1928.
- 15 Ibid., 26 May 1928.
- 16 F. Battistessa, interview, 9 Aug. 1971. Sydney Morning Herald, 31 May 1928.
- 17 Italo-Australian, 30 June 1928.
- 18 Ibid., 9 June 1928.
- 19 Ibid., 30 June 1928.
- 20 Ibid., 23 June 1928.
- 21 Ibid. Also 14 July 1928.
- 22 Ibid., 16 and 23 June 1928.
- 23 On this, see R. De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II, pp. 183-8, 302-4.
- 24 Ibid., 27 Oct. 1928.
- 25 Battistessa, interview, 3 Aug. 1972.
- 26 Italo-Australian, 3 Nov. 1928.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., 10 Nov. 1928.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 24 Nov. 1928.
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Daily Guardian, 12 Nov. 1928.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Il
- 35 Italo-Australlian, 20 July 1929.
- 36 Sun, Sydney, 16 July 1929.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 On this, see De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II, pp. 349-52.
- 39 On this, see R. De Felice, *Intervista sul Fascismo*, Bari, 1975, chapter 3.
- 40 Italo-Australian, 26 May 1928.

4

The Years of Fascist Imperialism, 1932-1940

The twentieth century will be the century of Fascism, will be the century of Italian might, will be the century during which Italy for the third time will take the lead of human civilisation, because outside our principles there is no salvation, neither for the individual nor for the peoples ... Within a decade Europe will be Fascist or fascistised.

This belief, expressed by Mussolini in his speech in Milan on 24 October 1932, during the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the regime, the *Decennale*, highlighted the significant switch in Italy's foreign policy which took place in that year.

Although the party's élite had been confronted since the early 1920s with the dilemma whether to encourage far rightwing movements abroad to follow the Italian example or to consider Fascism as a political phenomenon peculiar to Italy alone, a dilemma which was reflected in the Duce's apparently contradictory statements on this problem, not until 1933 was the policy of spreading Fascism abroad and of supporting political movements friendly to the Italian regime actually adopted.

Mussolini's inconsistency is only apparent, since it became expedient for him to draw on the support of the Fascists abroad by keeping their hopes alive and by using them as a possible threat against hostile powers, while at the same time reassuring foreign governments that Italian Fascism would not be a party to the undermining of their institutions.

It can be argued that the successful bid for power of the National Socialist Party in Germany offered the Italian dictator the opportunity for a change of policy. In addition, the failure of the ruralisation and fascistisation programs at home prodded Mussolini to divert the attention of his subjects to international problems and to seek success in this context to compensate for the defeat of his internal policies.⁴.

Having consolidated his regime at home, and spurred by Hitler's success,⁵ the Duce turned his energy to the task of creating an international climate favourable to the emergence of Fascist movements in other countries. In July 1932 he dismissed his Foreign Minister, Dino Grandi, and once again took control of this portfolio.⁶

Although steps to bring Italians abroad under a stricter supervision by the Fascist Party (to make them, in Mussolini's words, 'disciplined abroad . . . as I demand and see to it that Italians are disciplined at home')⁷ had been taken since the late 1920s, the new ecumenical attitude of Italy's foreign policy had the effect of encouraging among Italians abroad the debate on Fascism's role in the world and of stimulating their sense of identity with the regime's imperial aspirations. This response was evident also in Australia.

It is significant that in 1933 Consul-General Ferrante, during his first year of office, was mostly concerned with allaying the preoccupation of informed Australians and Italian migrants on the nature of Italian imperialism. On his arrival he had stressed Italy's desire for peace and friendship with the other European nations,⁸ and he continued to reiterate these points during the following months.⁹ Yet this policy of prestige and peace was not meant to be a sign of weakness on the part of Italy. Quite the opposite. 'Italy', Ferrante warned, 'has been accused of imperialism by some who are used to confounding the meaning of the two words "pacific" and "unwarlike";

instead, while 'she has no intention of interrupting peace, ... she is ready to defend her interests in any part of the world'. 10

Indeed, the events which took place in Australia between 1933 and 1940 can easily be related to the development of Italian foreign policy and can also be roughly divided into three stages: the period of preparation up to 1935; the years of fulfilment, from 1935 to 1937; and the years of totalitarian involvement, 1938 to 1940. A different consul-general presided over each of these stages: Agostino Ferrante, Marquis of Ruffano, held office from August 1932 to February 1935; Paolo Vita-Finzi from November 1935 to February 1937; and Amedeo Mammalella from April 1938 to June 1940.

During his consulate Ferrante began forging the instruments which in the late 1930s would enable the consuls to assume greater control of Italian activities. Although outwardly projecting the image of a typical old-style career diplomat, socialite, sportsman and horse-racing fan, the new consul-general nevertheless injected a new dynamism into Fascist politics in Australia.

In February 1933 he obtained the ratification by Rome of his appointment of Felice Rando, an ambitious young man who would rise in the late 1930s to the highest position of the Fascist hierarchy in Australia, as secretary of the Sydney Fascist branch.

Under Ferrante's and Rando's leadership, the party's control of Italian migrants grew significantly. In the cities the Fascio extended its influence over the existing associations and even created some of its own, such as the Dopolavoro, in order to condition the social, political and sporting life of Italians. At the beginning of 1935 in Sydney alone there were nineteen associations covering an Italian population of 3,000.11 In the countryside, and especially in Queensland, where there were large Italian communities along the sugar belt, the Fascist presence was also felt. There, every large centre had an Italian doctor and an Italian commission agent. These were usually strong Fascists, and became the leaders of the local communities and provided a liaison between the migrants and the consulates. Ferrante also planned to develop in these Queensland centres Italian minority groups strong enough to enforce any demands which they might put forward.12 Moreover, during this period the Fascist diplomats began practising a political control over Italian immigration whereby anyone who wished to bring his relatives from Italy had to obtain the approval of the consuls, who were thus able to ensure that known enemies of the regime did not reach Australia.¹³

However, by 1933 Fascism was no longer satisfied with an indirect control of the general political outlook of its nationals. but developed the screening of individual suspects. Ferrante and his consuls performed many of the functions of the OVRA. the Italian secret police. In particular, they carried out investigations into the activities of anti-Fascist Italians, built up dossiers on those whom they considered subversive, exchanged information with the OVRA headquarters in Italy and improved the intelligence apparatus which they had inherited from the 1920s.¹⁴ A section of the Central Political Office of the Italian Ministry for the Interior, entrusted with the task of spying on the enemies of the regime in this country. had been operating at the Melbourne consulate as early as 1928. Its files contained photographs of suspects and covered their lifetime movements and activities. The dossier on Francesco Fantin, an Anarchist who was killed by a Fascist internee at the Loveday Internment Camp in 1942, contains evidence that he had been closely watched since 1927, and that his murder was due, in the conclusion reached by the Australian Security Service, to 'a long and carefully planned campaign against him which was initiated in Rome as far back as 1927'.15

For the gathering of these data, Ferrante and his agents relied upon a number of informers in the Italian community as well as upon information supplied by Australian authorities. In November 1933 he did not hesitate to ask the Minister for External Affairs for details regarding five Italians, in particular their 'political and moral behaviour' and even their addresses. ¹⁶ He also continued to use the tactic started by his predecessor, Grossardi, of denouncing the anti-Fascists to the Australian government as dangerous subversives, as Communists. Ferrante made it quite clear to the Minister for External Affairs that he expected from the Commonwealth some demonstrative action against his enemies, and not just

words of acknowledgment of his efforts: as he put it:

I have always thought it my essential duty to co-operate with the proper authorities by notifying them of the names of persons on whose behaviour I had received unfavourable reports, for measures to be taken against them, not excluding their deportation.¹⁷

To the credit of the Australian government, no anti-Fascist in Australia was ever deported or handed over to the Fascist authorities on grounds of his political beliefs, because the Commonwealth Investigation Branch had seen through the motives behind the consul-general's pleas. 18

By 1933 Ferrante began sending regularly to the National Fascist Institute for Commerce Abroad in Rome quarterly reports (later they became bi-monthly) on the economic, political and social conditions of all Australian states. These reports covered twenty-nine points of inquiry, which included all possible aspects of migrant life. ¹⁹ At the same time efforts were made to improve the means of receiving news directly from Italy, to balance the news reports on Italian politics published by British and Australian sources. In December 1933 the consul-general asked the Department of External Affairs to allow him to use the services of the Amalgamated Wireless company to receive the Italian government official press news, broadcast by the *Agenzia Stefani*, ²⁰ but permission was not granted. ²¹

The problem of drawing on Fascist information sources was partially resolved when the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs commissioned a journalist in Rome, Goliardo Paoloni, to write for *Il Giornale Italiano*, which regularly published his articles.

After the noticeable lack of success in moulding a generation of Fascists out of Italians, the problem of youth education became in Australia, as well as in Italy, an important priority for the Fascist officials. The schools organised by the *Fascio* were subsidised by the Italian consulates, ²² and parents were encouraged to send their children there. ²³ In 1935 the teaching of Italian was introduced in New South Wales at an intermediate and high school level, after considerable lobbying by Ferrante and A. Baccarini. ²⁴

The Italian Fascists in Australia also strove to catch up with the political developments taking place in Italy, and in this process they became victims of the aggressive self-confidence generated by the growing militarist rhetoric. This attitude was manifest also in business. In April 1934 Ferrante tried unsuccessfully to sell to the Department of the Navy some FIAT motorboats.²⁵ while in August Italy unilaterally cut by 50 per cent its imports of Australian wool in retaliation for the considerable deficit in her balance of payments with Australia. This measure was interpreted by the Minister for Trade and Customs, T. W. White, as a breach of the Anglo-Italian Treaty of 1883.26 By the end of 1934 the Fascist authorities in Australia defiantly declared 2 November to be the 'Day of the Italian Product', and urged Italians to buy exclusively Italian goods in support of the regime's policy of autarchy.²⁷ Such selfconfidence was bolstered in October 1934 by the coming to Sydney and to Melbourne of the cruiser Armando Diaz, the first Italian warship to enter Australian waters since the Libia in 1922. The visit, paid on occasion of the Centenary Celebration of the state of Victoria, was hailed by the Italian authorities and by the Fascist press in Australia as an important political event.28

It can therefore be said that when in February 1935 Ferrante was posted to Malta, he left behind a situation in which Fascism was solidly entrenched and attracted the active or passive support of the majority of Italians in Australia. His successor, Vita-Finzi, inherited a consular territory which was well prepared to face the crises in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Spain.

Of Jewish extraction, Paolo Vita-Finzi was born in Turin in 1899. World War I saw him in the front line where he fought gallantly and was awarded a bronze medal and two war crosses. In November 1920 he graduated in law at Turin University, joined the diplomatic service and began a career which brought him to Algiers, Dusseldorf, Sfax, Tiflis and Rosario (Argentina) before coming to Sydney.

When he took charge of his new posting, the Abyssinian affair had already erupted into full-scale war. In the months before Vita-Finzi's arrival, the Melbourne consul, Anzilotti, had taken temporary control of Italian affairs in Australia and

had faced the wave of hostility arising from Australian circles with coolness and sense of leadership. When scores of Italians, concerned by the possibility of a war between the British Commonwealth and Italy, and dreading to be called to the colours, rushed to obtain their naturalisation, they were condemned in the strongest terms and their names were published by the Italo-Australian, thus exposing them to the contempt of the public. Anzilotti put the weight of his official position behind this condemnation. At a meeting at the Club Cavour in Melbourne in August 1935, he stated that in those circumstances, he considered the applicants for naturalisation to be vulgar betrayers of their Fatherland, and ordered their expulsion from the Fascist branches.29 At the same time, he laid down four guidelines for Italians in this country: to remain Italian, not to be alarmed by the news printed by the Australian press, which was often false, to avoid discussions with Australians which could degenerate into incidents, and to isolate themselves from the Australian environment in order to avoid the hostility which surrounded them. 30

These measures had to be taken because in the early stages of the dispute many migrants and even some party members wavered in their faith; a few openly expressed their fears, others became naturalised or changed their names to conceal their origin.³¹ To make matters worse, Italian anti-Fascists were quick to condemn the colonial war and its supporters at protest rallies, or with resolutions which were sent to the consulate-general, notably from Griffith and Mourilyan.³² Disturbed by the anti-Fascists' campaign, *Il Giornale Italiano* attacked them furiously, in particular through the pen of its editor, Franco Battistessa.

The initial hesitation in handling the situation was quickly overcome by the Italian diplomats. By July 1935 the Italian associations in Melbourne had closed ranks and declared their unconditional support for Fascism's African venture, while lectures were given to Italians explaining Italy's colonial policy. In February 1936 Il Giornale Italiano began coming out twice weekly to counter more effectively what was seen as the unjustified hostility of the Australian press against the Italian case. Moreover, a significant propaganda effort was made throughout 1935 and 1936 by A. Baccarini, who

published in Italian as well as Australian newspapers, articles on the Abyssinian conflict,³³ spoke on the radio, held lectures and published a book, *What for, Abyssinia? The League*, most probably using official Italian sources supplied to him by the consulate-general.³⁴

Diplomatic activity also increased; in September 1935 Acting Consul-General Vitali handed to Prime Minister Lyons an *aide-memoire* explaining the position of the Italian government on the Abyssinian question.³⁵ Consul-General Vita-Finzi had not even presented his credentials when he was involved in protesting against the publishing of a caricature of Mussolini in the *Sunday Sun and Guardian* on 1 December 1935.³⁶ Although Anzilotti had already made representations against the insulting expressions used by many Australian newspapers with regard to the Duce, the Italian nation and her army, asking Canberra to intervene and to ban the publication of these articles,³⁷ the only result that he and Vita-Finzi could obtain was an appeal by Lyons to the press not to print anything affecting the Italo-Abyssinian dispute which would embarrass the Australian government.³⁸

Notwithstanding the opposition, indeed in spite of it, it can be argued that the great majority of Italians in Australia approved of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Their enthusiasm was so intoxicating that it surprised even the Fascist officials. The argument of Italy's spreading, as Battistessa put it, 'Latin civilisation against the diabolical barbarism of wild Africa', 39 was well received by the migrants who saw in the Italian version of the Anglo-Saxon concept of the white man's burden, the long-awaited and much needed factual refutation of all remarks made by many Australian newspapers of the time on the inferiority and on the social, political and military backwardness of southern Europeans.

The fact that Italy now had an empire, as did Great Britain, gave Italians the confidence and the capacity to overcome their inferiority complex towards the British. In short, theirs was an explosion of nationalism, a manifestation of approval for the policies of the government of the Fatherland. If it was a dictatorial and Fascist government, that was a point of relative unimportance. Evidence of such state of mind is given by two circumstances: that now, even some anti-Fascists

backed the colonial policy of the regime, and that the numbers of migrants participating at meetings and activities in support of the war effort were far superior to those attracted by rallies purely Fascist in nature.

These two facts did not escape the consuls' attention. At the celebration of the anniversaries of the March on Rome and of the Victory held on 27 October 1935 on board the motorship Esquilino in Sydney, more than 800 Italians assembled 'to show their full agreement with the national politics'. 40 When news reached Australia of the capture of Addis Ababa, unprecedented crowds of migrants joined the Fascist officials in the festivities. In Adelaide, more than 500 people out of a total Italian population in South Australia of 1,500, some of them coming from as far away as 400 kilometres, took part at a meeting. The Adelaide News reported that: 'outside the premises where the celebration took place, were dozens of vehicles which ranged from fish carts and fruit lorries to luxurious limousines. The happy, laughing crowd inside were no less varied'. 41 At Wonthaggi, a traditional anti-Fascist centre, Italian miners left their jobs, commandeered a bus, decorated it with the Italian flag and went to other towns singing patriotic songs and spreading the news.42 Italians, Fascists and some anti-Fascists, happily mixed in the same rejoicing crowds: Vita-Finzi reported that at a Sydney gathering, 'there was pointed out to me a little group of subversive individuals from the South Coast who applauded with more enthusiasm than the others'.43

The spontaneity of Italians' enthusiasm is illustrated by the success of the various initiatives taken by the consulates during the Abyssinian war. Many migrants offered to volunteer for service in East Africa, but none of them actually managed to go there. The collection of gold and the donations of gold wedding rings for the Fatherland began in December 1935 on the initiative of Vita-Finzi, to and the names of the donors were printed weekly by the Italian press in Australia. The gold appeal raised 21½ kilograms of gold and 31½ of silver. To Sometimes the patriotic fervour was collective: the small community of fishermen of Fremantle donated more than 1½ kilograms of gold and a large sum of money at a rally on 30 December 1935. By February 1936 the Melbourne

Fascio had sent to the Italian Treasury 2,396 lire as a contribution to the anti-sanctionist campaign,⁴⁹ while by March Italians in Australia had donated more than £5,000 to the Italian Red Cross.⁵⁰ Money flowed in also for projects such as the construction of an Italian school in Abyssinia⁵¹ or for sending gift parcels to servicemen there.⁵²

The interest in the Abyssinian war was so high among Italian migrants that many of them, especially in Western Australia, purchased short-wave radio sets to tune in to Rome's news reports.⁵³

In 1936 Vita-Finzi continued to maintain pressure on the patriotism of his countrymen as well as to contest any offensive or negative remark uttered by Australian critics. In May he sent to the government a note of protest against a broadcast from Sydney 2CH Station, in which Italy was accused of being behind the Arab revolt in Palestine.⁵⁴

Italy's African campaign had the effect of uniting the overwhelming majority of Italians in Australia behind the policies of Fascism and behind the organisations which the Fascist officials had created in Australia for the purpose of controlling and guiding the community. It also tested the efficiency of such organisations as well as of the instruments of control which the consuls had forged.

Although the Spanish Civil War determined the future of Fascism more than any other event, it did not rouse among Italians feelings so deep and emotional as the war in Abyssinia. Spain's was a war of ideologies, not a conflict with which the poorly-educated, nationalist migrants could identify themselves. By this time, Italians believed that they were living in an anti-Italian environment, isolated in a sea of hostility. The Spanish affair was seen as a problem remote from their interests, to be left to those who knew best, to the politicians; they did not expect to gain personally as from the conquest of Abyssinia, where many of them hoped to go eventually as settlers. Therefore, Spain did not attract large meetings, donations, political mobilisation. The struggle was delegated mainly to the newspapers, which by now were 'nothing more or less than an extension of the Italian press to Australia',55

By the end of 1936, Fascist influence among Italians, and the network of centres which carried out propaganda, espionage and proselytising activities, were so sophisticated that they caused real concern to the Australian Security Service. Although the possibility of a conflict led the consuls to avoid publicity as far as possible, except in those cases where appeals were directed to Australians generally, ⁵⁶ Fascist operations in Australia now reached an intensity never experienced before.

A population of approximately 40,000 Italians was under the jurisdiction of the Sydney consulate-general, the Melbourne consulate, the vice-consulates of Townsville, Adelaide and Perth and the consular agencies at Cairns, Brisbane and Hobart.⁵⁷ Fascist branches were active in Sydney, Brisbane, Ingham, Cairns, Babinda, Innisfail, Melbourne (with sections at Shepparton, Wonthaggi and Werribee), Adelaide, Port Pirie, Perth (with a section at Wiluna) and Fremantle. In the late 1930s sections were also opened at Stanthorpe, Texas, Corrimal, Coffs Harbour, Port Wakefield and a branch at Edie Creek in New Guinea.

The Associazione Nazionale Combattenti (National ex-Servicemen's Association) had sections in Sydney, Melbourne, Babinda, Cairns, Shepparton, Wonthaggi, Werribee and Perth; the National Union of Italian Reserve Officers had branches in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Townsville; the Dante Alighieri Society had centres in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne; there were Fascio schools in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Shepparton, Wonthaggi, Werribee, Adelaide, Fremantle, Perth and Wiluna.

The consulates also supervised or strongly influenced the activities of the Italian clubs at Mourilyan, Cairns, Brisbane, Fremantle, the Eolian Islands Club and the *Club Italia* in Sydney, the *Club Cavour* and the Ealian Islands Mutual Benefit Society in Melbourne, and the House of Italy in Perth. Moreover, in Sydney there were also the female *Fascio*, the Youth Group, the Italian Army and Navy Union, the National Association of the *Alpini*, the Italian Inter-University Institute, the Italian Chamber of Commerce.

Three newspapers pursued the official Fascist line: the *Italo-Australian* in Sydney, the *Il Giornale Italiano* in Melbourne

and L'Italiano in Brisbane (the Corrière degli Italiani in Australia merged with Il Giornale Italiano in July 1937).

It is therefore hardly surprising that the Australian authorities saw with apprehension this mushrooming of Fascist bodies; evidence of this attitude is the lengthy and detailed Summary on Italian and Fascist Activities and Propaganda in Australia drafted by the security service in December 1936.⁵⁸ Not only was it noted that Italy at that time was 'spending money lavishly on propaganda and on maintaining the Italianity of her nationals', ⁵⁹ but Major Jones agreed with the British Intelligence Service that Italian Fascism was more dangerous than the Nazi movement, because:

while the Italian Fascist organisation is perhaps run on less methodical lines than its German counterpart, it was obvious that it does provide the Italian government with ready-made machinery for dangerous action in British countries in an emergency. If less methodical in detail, the Italian Regime has the advantage of being more mature. 60

Consequently, he instructed all his branches and the Directors of Military and Naval Intelligence to increase, in the utmost secrecy, the surveillance of Fascist activities. Agents were ordered to ascertain the extent of consular and Fascio activities, eventual contacts with Australian people who might be potential informers, the names of the leaders of Italian societies and of the officials of the Italian shipping lines as possible couriers of naval information; also, they had to examine the personnel of civil aerodromes and aircraft companies and record all principal Italian restaurants, cafés, etc. which were meeting places of Fascists. 61 In June 1937 the Commonwealth government appointed a committee consisting of representatives of the CIB, of the Departments of the Interior and External Affairs, of the Army and Navy Intelligence, to investigate Italian activities in Australia, and received its report in December of the same year.62

The Australian Security Service's apprehensions were not unfounded. By the late 1930s the consulates were unequivocally engaged in espionage activities. Apart from sending to the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs extremely accurate and detailed analyses on Australia's internal, foreign, economic and immigration policies, on her trade relations and, significantly, on the state of her defences, on the army, navy, air force, war industries and civil aviation, 63 the Italian consulates had extended their surveillance from those migrants belonging to anti-Fascist groups to all Italians who for one reason or another did not toe the line imposed by Fascist officials. By April 1937 the security service had evidence that files were being kept on Italians who had adopted British nationality during the Abyssinian campaign.⁶⁴ Also, Military Intelligence had received in June 1936 positive information that 'the OVRA function[s] under an official who is located at the Italian Consulate-General in Sydney' and that the Italian Secret Service had placed spies in various places in Australia. 65 In fact, the OVRA had agents in every consulate and also many secretaries of the Fascist branches were members of the OVRA.66 This agency gathered information through a considerable network of Italian informers who reported to confidential agents appointed by the Fascio secretary. In 1939 the Sydney branch had fifteen of such agents.67

From an analysis of documents seized by the security service at the Adelaide vice-consulate at the outbreak of World War II, it is now possible to reconstruct the modus operandi of Italian espionage in Australia. Owing to the irresponsibility of Vice-Consul Amerio, who left many compromising documents in his files which a trained man would have destroyed, the 2.400 files captured establish conclusively that the consulgeneral in Sydney received reports from the other consulates: 'on the State economics, such as imports and exports . . . the extent of public services and the location of important plants, such as gas, electricity, water supply, railway repairing yards, etc'. 68 Amerio also sent to the consul-general details of the movements of Australian naval units. The consuls had their 'spies in well protected positions', and the files 'reveal the existence of trained informers', whose letters were carelessly kept by the vice-consulate. Spies came also from Italy; in March 1939 two agents arrived with the MV Viminale, 69 which, as with all other Italian ships, had among its crew OVRA agents who regularly carried out espionage work during their stay in Australian ports.

While the consul-general and the Melbourne consul were concerned mainly with espionage regarding Australia, 70 affairs concerning Italians in Australia were taken care of by the section of the Central Political Office operating from the Melbourne consulate and directed by Gianni Borsi, who worked under the cover of consular secretary. He not only was 'the general advisor in all matters affecting the supervision of real or suspected subversive individuals of Italian origin'.71 but masterminded all secret police activities. In Adelaide alone files were kept on fifty anti-fascists, that is, on 10 per cent of the Italian population. Borsi contacted his informers either personally or by telephone; nevertheless the archives captured contain 'ample evidence of the secret political junta's operations within the Italian community'. He was the eminence grise of Italian espionage in Australia; apart from intelligence activities, the Adelaide files document also: 'cases of flagrant dishonesty on the part of Consul officials, and always it was to Borsi that they appealed when their dishonesty was found out'.72

Borsi's cover was never blown. In 1939, when he became acting consul during Arrighi's leave, all that the Investigation Branch knew of him was that he was 'a likeable young man', married to an Australian, and well known to Inspector Browne.⁷³

It is not surprising that Australian Intelligence, in part aware and in part guessing of the danger of Fascist activities, took them very seriously. Already during the Abyssinian war the service was alarmed by the possibility of sabotage by Italians and warned all its branches that the intention to use Italian *Fasci* in British countries for sabotage purposes in the event of hostilities has existed in the minds of the Italian authorities.⁷⁴

Thus Canberra began building up its own network of informers within the Italian community; the security service files covering these years contain much interesting information about their identity, sometimes concealed under fanciful code names, their methods and their reports. To Some of them were well known in the community for their social and economic standing, and had been careful to build up for themselves a political alibi beyond suspicion. For instance, a

prominent Cairns businessman, Pietro Martinuzzi, having 'considerable influence with the Italian element' in the late 1930s, was believed to be 'active in stirring up anti-British feelings'. When war broke out, he was interned by the Commonwealth Police but Military Intelligence ordered his immediate release because he had been 'a source of information to the Intelligence Section with regard to the subversive activities of other Italians'. 77

Sometimes the role of an informer was so complex that it is hard to assess for which side he was working. For instance, since 1935 Vaccari was supplying information to Australian Intelligence, which was convinced that 'he did not agree with the Fascist idea'.78 Yet during the late 1930s he often expressed in public his support for Fascism and donated lavishly to Fascist causes, while in private, and unknown to the CIB, he was concerned in dispelling the misconception that he was anti-Fascist⁷⁹ and was advising C. Albanese, editor of *L'Italiano*, to adhere strictly to a policy favouring Fascism.⁸⁰ In 1940 Vaccari was still in close contact with the security service and 'on occasions, rendered service of value'. The service still had 'no reason to doubt his loyalty' and his 'readiness to assist' was considered as 'evidence of his real feelings'.⁸¹

Known Fascists and migrants attending Fascist meetings were closely watched by intelligence officers. Battistessa was reported observing fuel oil tanks and taking 'many notes' at Port Pirie. In the same township, Italians taking part in a picnic suspected of being a Fascist rally had the registration numbers of their cars taken down for identification.⁸²

Circumstantial evidence also suggests that Australian Intelligence had agents within some Italian consulates and even received from them copies of OVRA correspondence; this source was regarded by Military Intelligence as 'most reliable'83 and great pains were taken not to expose these informants.84

When Consul-General Vita-Finzi was recalled home and Amedeo Mammalella was appointed new consul-general, 85 Fascism had achieved extensive control of the community. Between 1938 and 1940 Mammalella only improved it and tuned Fascist propaganda and activities to the highest pitch

ever reached in Australia. Migrants were constantly reminded of their nationhood so that they found it impossible, even if they were willing, to sever their ties with Italy and to become loyal citizens of Australia. A security officer perceptively noticed that:

the venomous propaganda calculatingly drummed into them by their erstwhile [sic] Government has in many cases become irremovably ingrained in their character... Gullibility due to much illiteracy and a low standard of education, pliableness of mind and impressionability due to youth has made the 'driving-in' process by high pressure methods, easy and thorough.86

These methods boosted the confidence of Italians in Fascism and encouraged them to express it defiantly in front of foreigners.⁸⁷

Whenever the consuls judged that Italians did not respond according to their wishes, they did not refrain from using threats or questionable methods. Migrants were 'persuaded' to become members of the Fascio, to come to Fascist meetings, not to renounce, or to advise others to renounce, Italian citizenship, to sell their properties and to return to Italy, to consent to serve in the Italian armed forces even if naturalised British subjects.88 Political pressure was applied also to members of the Italian Establishment in Australia. In 1933 L'Italiano fell into disfavour for having printed a letter from an Italian anti-Fascist. The newspaper lost advertising from the Italia Shipping Company and its editor was informed that: 'the paper would be refused entry to Italy, that he himself would not be allowed to return to Italy, and that he must change the policy of the paper to one more in favour with the Italian Government'.89 In 1935 Commander Duilio Nurra was suspended from the Fascio for having been disrespectful to the consular authorities, 90 and in 1938 a journalist was 'advised' to sever his connections with L'Italiano.91 In 1940 the editor of this newspaper informed Vaccari that Mammalella had told him that if he wanted to maintain good relations with the authorities, the paper could not print any criticism, even if justified; it was essential, in order not to be accused of anti-Fascism, to carry out a policy of 'absolute obedience'. otherwise the newspaper would be 'excommunicated' and Italians instructed not to purchase it if they did not want to be registered in the 'black book'.92

On the other hand, if a newspaper was totally subservient to the consular political dictates, it was rewarded with a subsidy. The Cosmopolitan Publishing Company which printed *Il Giornale Italiano* received an annual grant of £500.93

During the two years preceding the outbreak of the war, Mammalella exercised a dictatorial influence over the affairs of the community. Neapolitan, a man of culture although he did not speak English, he imposed his personality on his countrymen by frequent lecturing, haranguing, contacting people, by compelling the powerful to mix with the humble, by not tolerating any diversity of opinion, by displaying kindness and wit as well as by using pressure and force.

After the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Pact of Steel, he renewed efforts for a rapprochement between Nazis and Fascists in Australia, and as from February 1938 some public functions were held at clubs in the presence of Italian and German consuls, and propaganda films were screened.94 But collaboration between the two communities did not develop much further. There was no co-ordination of policies between the Nazi and Fascist branches.95 and the German community maintained an attitude of disdain towards Italians, 96 the latter being mainly working people, while the former were professional men and woolbuvers; they could have nothing in common. Thus liaison between Nazis and Fascists was kept essentially through the consulates. In Melbourne, the secretary of the German consulate, who was also the Gestapo chief in Australia, and spoke Italian fluently, sometimes addressed the Fascists at their gatherings, and in Sydney the connection was maintained by a consular employee, Ladendorff, whose wife was half-Italian.97 The chief of the Central Political Office, Borsi, was also in contact with the Germans through the Director of Il Giornale Italiano, F. M. Bianchi.98

Although the international situation and the hostility towards Fascism induced the Fascist officials in the late 1930s to tone down their outbursts and to act covertly, incidents did occur. Several protests by Italian diplomats against hostile press articles contributed to maintain that siege mentality

which was so necessary for them to exclude Italians from any meaningful external democratic influence and to motivate the migrants' support for Fascism. There is also reason to suspect that sometimes Fascists provoked and welcomed the Australians' hostility. In October 1937 wide publicity was given to the intention of the Sydney Fascists to broadcast from Station 2SM 'propaganda of national utility in defence of Italy and Italians', and Italian tenor Tito Schipa raised his hand five times giving the Fascist salute at a concert at the Sydney Town Hall in July 1937 after being warned by Alderman Donald Grant that this political act would be resented by the Australian public.

The most serious diplomatic incident, with the exception of the *Montecuccoli* affair in February 1938 (see pp. 00), occurred in 1940, when Felice Rando succeeded Amerio as vice-consul in Adelaide. He had already attracted the attention of Military Intelligence in August 1938 when, in the words of an army officer, 'he began his work of fostering strife and national feeling'.³

A short while after taking office, on 17 March 1940, Rando delivered a speech to the Italian community of Adelaide. With a tone of voice that the security service observer described as 'high-pitched' and 'husky', Rando 'held his audience in tense and unwavering attention', being 'a pastmaster of the Hitlerian ranting method', and 'embarked upon the most virulent and inflammatory speech, quite openly anti-British and anti-Ally'.4

Immediately the Minister for Foreign Affairs called Mammalella to Canberra and gave him a strong warning that unless he was able to prevent a recurrence of such an incident, he would make diplomatic representations directly to the Italian government. Mammalella apologised and 'went so far as to say that he was prepared to close the Italian Consulate at Adelaide and dispense with the services of Mr Rando'.⁵

By this time the relations between Italy and the Commonwealth and the position of Italians in Australia had deteriorated to such an extent that this incident could not worsen them any further. The awareness that Italy would side against the Allies and the possibility that Italians in Australia would be a potential military danger had been considered since

early 1939 and measures to neutralise their effectiveness had already been taken. By May, attempts were made to disperse Italians in order to reduce their organisational strength, while in Queensland Italian centres had been searched in vain for hidden arms and ammunition. At this time the security service had completed the indexing of all Italians who were thought to represent a threat to the country. Serious consideration was given to the possibility that Fascists might carry out acts of sabotage. In 1940 all branches of the service were instructed to give this matter special consideration after Canberra had received information from London that Italian consuls in British territories had instructed their co-nationals to commit acts of destruction on an extensive scale.

It was feared that Italian wharf labourers, and miners and lorry drivers working in quarries, who had access to explosive materials, would steal them for sabotage purposes; they, and those who were considered agents of the Italian espionage network, were watched constantly by Australian Intelligence. By mid-April 1940 the army was asked to complete without delay measures to treat Italians as enemy aliens and to maintain extra vigilance against possible Fascist saboteurs. On 10 May a comprehensive plan had been drafted, whereby 1,135 Italians, including at least 187 naturalised British subjects, were considered for internment. It was believed that by detaining a comparatively small number of their leaders, Italians would be prevented from being a source of danger to the security of Australia.

The possibility of having to intern large numbers of migrants, irrespective of their political beliefs, loomed large, owing to the sharp increase in hostility towards the Italian community, 13 hostility which found its most irrational expression in the 'fifth column' scare. Many Australian organisations appealed to the government to beware the danger of Italians forming a Fascist guerrilla army in Australia on the model of the one raised in Madrid by the Falangists during the Spanish Civil War. 14 The feeling of hostility was so high that Western Command in May 1940 thought seriously of interning a large percentage of Italians for their own protection, in fear of major demonstrations against them, 15 while the New South Wales government

became worried by the absence of any state powers to deal with the situation and attracted the Prime Minister's attention to the fact that: 'the feeling against disloyalists in this State has become so intense that disorder is likely to break out at any time unless the fears of the community can be allayed by prompt action'. ¹⁶

War was now imminent, and it was clear to everybody that a long period of hardship was before all Italian migrants, longtime settlers and newly arrived, naturalised British subjects and Italian citizens. Fascists and anti-Fascists. Fascism's thundering propaganda claims of having re-modelled innocent peasants and labourers into Mussolini's soldiers, into fighting legions, of having vanguished all anti-Fascist opposition, of having created a new breed of Italian, achieved the paradoxical result of convincing many Australians and some officers of their Intelligence Services that Italian migrants were dangerous elements, fifth columnists ready to strike, eager to use the stocks of weapons and explosives which allegedly were in their possession. The truth was that they were nothing of the sort. Not one act of sabotage was committed, not one weapon or a pound of explosive was found in their hands, not a single attempt at organising any covert military group was exposed.

When Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, Italians, as they had been led by the Fascist officials into political obedience during the years of Fascist imperialism, were meekly led into internment camps, after having been rounded up by police officers as well as by zealous vigilante groups. Both gaolers and internees were victims of a political doctrine which advanced claims that proved groundless. The former believed that Italians were all Fascists, were all for Mussolini. were really what Fascist propaganda was fictitiously claiming they were; consequently they threw in the same camps the Fascists with the anti-Fascists, the naturalised British subjects with the migrants who were still Italian nationals, the Jews side by side with those who advocated their racial extermination. On the other hand, the bulk of the Italian population, although it did not take active part in Fascist politics, was largely sympathetic to this credo, having been led to believe that Fascism was the answer to their problems, that

Mussolini was always right and that soon Australia would also be Fascist. So ingrained was this conviction in the average migrant that on the whole he did not change his mind even after the internment camp doors closed behind him.

The people largely responsible for the perpetration of this deception were more fortunate. The consul-general, the other consuls and the consular staff on 30 June 1940 left Australia for Japan on the MV *Kamo Maru*, and the safeguard of Italian interests in Australia was handed over to the Japanese consulate-general.¹⁷

Thus the years of Fascist imperialism, after a triumphant beginning, ended in what can be truly called an anti-climax. Italians in Australia had the doubtful privilege of being the first to experience personally, well before their brothers in Italy, the vacuity of Fascism's pretensions and to witness the first act of Fascism's own final solution.

Notes

1 B. Mussolini, Opera Omnia, XXV, pp. 147-8.

2 On this, see Meir Michaelis, 'I rapporti tra Fascismo e Nazismo prima dell'avvento di Hitler al potere (1922-1933)', Rivista Storica Italiana, LXXXV, No. 3, 1973, pp. 569-78. Also, Renzo De Felice, Mussolini il duce I. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936,

Torino, 1974, pp. 307-11.

3 Dino Grandi, during the dramatic last meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on 24-25 July 1943, pointed out that this change of policy took place 'in 1932, during the *Decennale* of the Revolution, when . . . to the fundamental principle which had guided until then our international activities (Fascism is not an article for export) was substituted the subversive and apocalyptic principle of "Fascist universalism" and of Fascism as a breeder of a new world revolution' (quoted in Michaelis, 'I rapporti tra Fascismo').

4 De Felice, Mussolini il duce I, pp. 179-99.

5 At this time ultra Fascist circles in Rome and people of Mussolini's entourage, as well as some members of the Fascist Grand Council, wanted to 'draw as close as possible to Hitler and his Nazis and throw in their lot with them'. This policy was resisted by Grandi. (AA, CRS A981 item Italy 60, pt I. External Affairs Note, undated).

6 On this, see C. F. Delzell, Mediterranean Fascism, New York,

1970, pp. 185-6.

- 7 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30565, Military Intelligence Report, 26 July 1939.
- 8 Italo-Australian, 20 Aug. 1932.
- 9 Ibid., 10 Dec. 1932. In this context, see also the editorial in Il Giornale Italiano of 22 April 1933, which stated that 'the Italian Duce is essentially a man of peace and the only hegemony he advocates for Italy is a spiritual and cultural one, not political or territorial'.
- 10 Italo-Australian, 17 Dec. 1932.
- 11 Il Giornale Italiano, 8 May 1935.
- 12 AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/11, W. B. Simpson to External Affairs, 3 April 1945. There were in Australia twenty Italian medical practitioners: seven in North Queensland, three in Brisbane, four in Sydney, four in Melbourne and two in Perth (AA, 13.P.242, item Q30577, Notes on the Italian Communities in Australia. 1939?).
- 13 AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/11, W. B. Simpson to External Affairs, 3 April 1945.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 AA, CRS A373, item 10913, Security Service Report 44/4221, 14 June 1944.
- 16 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 365, Ferrante to Latham, 3 Nov. 1933.
- 17 Ibid., item Consuls 359, Ferrante to Latham, 24 Aug. 1933.
- 18 On this, see AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 365, Jones to Prime Minister's Dept. 12 Jan. 1934.
- 19 AA, AP 501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Fascio Port Pirie III.
- 20 AA, CRS A1608, item F14/1/3, Ferrante to Latham, 6 Dec. 1933.
- 21 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 359, R. G. Casey to Ferrante, 21 May 1934.
- 22 In October 1935 the Adelaide Fascio received £13 5s. 6d. from the Adelaide vice-consulate (AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Adelaide Fascio to Adelaide vice-consulate, 27 Oct. 1933), while in May 1936, £105, donated by Gualtiero Vaccari for the teaching of Italian, were distributed by the Melbourne consulate to schools throughout Australia (ibid., Anzilotti to Amerio, 23 May 1936).
- 23 Il Giornale Italiano, 28 Aug. 1935.
- 24 Ibid., 1 May 1935.
- 25 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 359, Ferrante to Lyons, 20 April 1934. Gualtiero Vaccari was the FIAT representative in Australia at that time.
- 26 Il Giornale Italiano, 1 Aug. 1934. This retaliatory measure did not redress the balance of payments between the two countries. By 1937 in an Italian Political Report on Australia it is shown that the balance of trade was one to ten against Italy, owing to her heavy purchases of wool and wheat, with a net profit of £3,846,707 for Australia (United States National Archives, Italian Documents (hereafter USNAID) T586/1289/107007).

- 27 Il Giornale Italiano, 24 Oct. and 28 Nov. 1934.
- 28 Ibid., 10, 17 and 31 Oct. 1934. In command of the Armando Diaz was Captain Angelo Iachino, who during World War II would become one of the most famous admirals in the Royal Italian Navy. On board was also Junio Valerio Borghese, then midshipman, who would achieve fame in the 1940s as hero of the submarine war and commander of the ill-famed Tenth Mas Legion in 1944-45, and as leader of the aborted neo-Fascist coup d'etat in 1970.
- 29 Il Giornale Italiano, 31 July, 21 and 28 Aug. 1935. The number of Italians who obtained their naturalisation papers was so high that by 1938 more Italians were naturalised than applicants of any other nationality. Statistics issued by the Australian Dept of the Interior show that during the period 1933-8 'Italians formed forty-five per cent of the total persons to whom Certificates of Naturalisation were granted' (AA, CRS A461, item A349/3/6, pt I, Interior to Prime Minister's Dept, 27 Sept. 1938). By contrast, during the period 1923-33 only 5953 Italians had been granted naturalisation (Il Giornale Italiano, 6 Dec. 1933).
- 30 Il Giornale Italiano, 28 Aug. 1935. Anzilotti often stressed during these months the need for moderation; in January 1936 he warned Italians that 'a daily campaign of lies seeks to blind them: they must not be blinded!' (Il Giornale Italiano, 29 Jan. 1936).
- 31 Ibid., 31 July and 18 Dec. 1935; 13 May 1936.
- 32 Ibid., 11 Dec. 1935; AA, CRS A981, item Abyssinia 33 (old), Mourilyan Canecutters to Lyons, 18 Oct. 1935.
- 33 See his articles in Sydney *Telegraph*, 22 Aug. 1935 and *Il Giornale Italiano*, 9 and 16 Oct. and 4 and 18 Dec. 1935; 26 Feb., 18 March and 20 May 1936.
- 34 Although Baccarini was granted naturalisation in June 1930 he remained a member of the Sydney Fascist branch and continued to express in public his Fascist beliefs (cf. Il Giornale Italiano, 6 Feb. 1935). In 1935 he was among those British subjects of Italian origin who offered to serve with the Italian Army in Abyssinia (AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt III, CIB Report, undated, pp. 31-2). The source of information for his book was never established, but the Commonwealth Investigation Branch considered, in the words of its Director, that 'as he is persona grata with the Italian consular officials in Sydney, sufficient official material could have been placed at his disposal to help him compile the intricate details of the information contained in the book' (AA, CRS A981, item Abyssinia 50 (old), Jones to External Affairs, 28 July 1936).
- 35 Il Giornale Italiano, 4 Sept. 1935.
- 36 Ibid., 21 Dec. 1935; also AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 361, Vita-Finzi to Pearce, 3 Dec. 1935. The Minister for External Affairs

wrote to the Sunday Sun asking its Director not to exacerbate Italian feelings further, but was coldly rebuffed by him (ibid., Pearce to Sunday Sun, 9 Dec. 1935; Sunday Sun to Pearce, 11 Dec. 1935). Vita-Finzi, upon receiving a copy of Pearce's letter to the Sunday Sun and not knowing of the latter's reply to it, thought that 'effective measures have been taken to avoid repetition of such distasteful articles' (Il Giornale Italiano, 21 Dec. 1935). He would soon be disappointed.

37 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 361, Anzilotti to Pearce, 31 Oct. and 16 Nov. 1935.

38 Ibid., Pearce to Vita-Finzi, 9 Dec. 1935.

39 Il Giornale Italiano, 26 Feb. 1936.

- 40 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30577, Memorandum to Mussolini, 29 Oct. 1935, unsigned. Also, *Il Giornale Italiano*, 30 Oct. 1935.
- 41 Adelaide *News*, 5 May 1936. See also AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, Report, Adelaide *Fascio* to M. Miserocchi, 9 Nov. 1938.

42 Il Giornale Italiano, 13 May 1936.

- 43 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30577, Vita-Finzi to Mussolini, 23 May 1936. It was later reported to Rome that 'the Ethiopian campaign has hastened and made almost complete the process of redemption of those persons who emigrated many years ago and who through ignorance, personal resentment and bad faith had anti-Fascist ideas' (AA, 13.P.242, item Q30577, Notes on the Italian communities in Australia, 1939?).
- 44 Il Giornale Italiano, 28 Aug. 1935. Actually a known Fascist, Vittorio Tabacchi, who had returned to Italy, was with the Italian armies in Abyssinia and corresponded with his friends in Melbourne (ibid., 13 Nov. 1935).

45 Ibid., 11 Dec. 1935.

- 46 See Il Giornale Italiano and Italo-Australian, December 1935 and January 1936.
- 47 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30565, p. 116.
- 48 Il Giornale Italiano, 15 Jan. 1936.

49 Ibid., 26 Feb. 1936.

50 Ibid., 23 March 1936.

- 51 Ibid., 2 Sept. 1936. By this date the donations reached the amount of £96. See also AA, 13.P.242, item Q30580, Ib Section, Military Intelligence Report 18/1/353, 17 Dec. 1940.
- 52 Il Giornale Italiano, 22 April 1936.

53 Ibid., 6 Nov. 1935.

- 54 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 360, Vita-Finzi to Pearce, 20 May 1936.
- 55 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt IV, South Australia Security Report No. 73, undated.
- 56 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30580, Ib Section, Lt R. Finzel's Report, 15 Oct. 1941, p. 5. Also, see ibid., item Q30565, Italians, Master File 1940-42, p. 78.

57 By the late 1930s, Italians were settled as follows:

tate 1000s, italialis were seculed as i	CHOWS.
Queensland	15,000
New South Wales	8,000
Victoria	7,000
South Australia	1,500
Western Australia	8,000
Tasmania	150
A.C.T.	30
Northern Territory	30
New Guinea	100
New Caledonia	50

(AA, 13.P.242, item Q30577, Notes on the Italian communities in Australia. 1939?).

- 58 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074.
- 59 Ibid., CIB Canberra to CIB Adelaide, 8 Dec. 1936.
- 60 Ibid., pt II, CIB Report, 22 June 1936.
- 61 Ibid., Jones to CIB Adelaide, 22 June 1936. It is obvious from their reports that not all investigators were culturally and politically prepared to take up their jobs: some were just crassly ignorant such as the South Australian detective who reported that his suspect, an unassuming and barely literate Southern Italian immigrant had 'corresponded with Mussolini and received a badge from him' (AA, MP729/6, item 63/401/93, Campbelltown Police Report, 11 July 1940).
- 62 AA, CRS A432, item 43/1122, Attorney-General's Dept to CIB Canberra, 16 June 1937; CIB Canberra to Attorney-General's Dept, 8 Dec. 1937.
- 63 See one of these reports in USNAID, T586/1289/107002-107011. The security service knew that 'part of an Italian Consul's duty includes the organisation and control of intelligence work in his area that is to say, the collection of information of military, naval and air importance. Italian commercial and shipping firms are also suspected of espionage and supply information to Consuls situated in seaside towns and ports' (AA, AP538/1, item SA3074 pt II, CIB Report, 22 June 1936).
- 64 AA, CRS A981, item Nationality and Naturalisation 43, Jones to External Affairs, 30 April 1937. See also AA, AP501/1, item SA19907, List of files captured by the CIB at the Adelaide Vice-Consulate in June 1940.
- 65 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, Military Intelligence to all Military Districts, 25 June 1936, p. 20.
- 66 Ibid., Military Intelligence to NECW Commands, 7 MD, 23 Aug. 1940, p. 31.
- 67 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, K. K. Barris, *Fascism*, p. 22; also AA, 13.P.242, item Q30565, Italians, Master File, 1940-42, p. 69.
- 68 AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Adelaide Security Service Report, 29 Aug. 1944.

- 69 The Investigation Branch was aware of the fact that 'at intervals of a fortnight approximately, Italian and German agents arrive here in the vessels of their countries' (AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 4 May 1939).
- 70 See, for instance, the documents relevant to Melbourne Consul Arrighi's request to Amerio for information on the reason for many government ministers' and public servants' flights to Alice Springs in July 1938, and Amerio's report to Arrighi which revealed that roads, houses and hutments 'some of which are large enough to serve as military barracks' were being built in view of the construction of a great centre for the air service and railway link between Adelaide and Darwin (AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Arrighi to Amerio, 2 Aug. 1938 and Amerio to Arrighi, 9 Aug. 1938).
- 71 AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Adelaide Security Service Report, 29 Aug. 1944.
- 72 Ibid.

77

- 73 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 158, CIB Melbourne to CIB Canberra, 23 March 1939.
- 74 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt II, Canberra CIB Report, 22 June 1936.
- 75 See, for instance, the reports of 'Prospector Reynolds' in ibid., pt I, 10 May 1940. Also, ibid., CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra 20 March 1940 and CIB Adelaide Report, 7 March 1940; pt II, CIB Canberra to CIB Adelaide, 27 April 1937.
- 76 AA, MP729/6, item 63/401/125, Military Intelligence Note, 22 June 1940.

Ibid., Defence Advisory Committee Minutes, 8 Aug. 1940. The

- Italian vice-consul at Townsville, Chieffi, must have suspected Martinuzzi of being a double agent; an Australian intelligence officer reported that, when Chieffi was told that the businessman had been interned, he stated that 'Martinuzzi's internment was the only one he was pleased about'. Apparently, the officer concluded ironically, 'Martinuzzi was no help to Chieffi's organisation' (ibid., Particulars of Pietro Martinuzzi).
- 78 AA, CRS A373, item 6230, CIB Report, 20 June 1941.
- 79 Ibid., Vaccari to Albanese, 12 April 1940.
- 80 Ibid., Vaccari to Albanese, 20 Feb. 1940. The Director-General of Security would not know about this until 1944 (ibid., W. G. Simpson to CIB Brisbane, 24 Feb. 1944).
- 81 AA, CRS A373, item 6230, CIB Report, 20 June 1941.
- 82 AA, AP538/1 item SA3074 pt I, CIB Adelaide Report, 9 Aug. 1939; ibid., Mt Barker Police Report, 15 April 1940.
- 83 AA, 13.P.242, item Q30565, Military Intelligence to NESW Commands, 7 M.D., 23 A ug. 1940, p. 29.
- 84 Ibid., Military Intelligence to Military Districts, 25 June 1936, p. 20.

- 85 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 161, Italian Embassy, London, to British Foreign Office, 23 Dec. 1937. Vita-Finzi fell into disgrace because he was a Jew. Soon after, his name appeared on the list of Jewish writers, issued by the Ministry for Popular Culture, whose works were banned from circulation in Italy (Cannistraro, La fabbrica del consenso. p. 434). During World War II he took refuge in Argentina where he published from 1943 to 1945 the anti-Fascist periodical Domani. After the war he took part in several seminars on Fascism (see his essay 'Italian Fascism and the intellectuals' in S. J. Woolf (ed.), The Nature of Fascism, London, 1968).
- 86 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074 pt IV, SA, Security Report No. 73, undated.
- 87 See ibid., pt II, Army to CIB Canberra, 10 Feb. 1939, where it was alleged that young members of the Italian community at Griffith 'are becoming arrogant'; or AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, CIB Canberra to External Affairs, 19 July 1938, when Major H. E. Jones reported that Fascist propaganda in North Queensland 'had the effect of giving some impetus to the Italian Fascist Movement'.
- 88 AA, AP538/I item SA3974, pt I, CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 23 June 1939; CIB Adelaide Report, 9 Aug. 1939; CIB Adelaide to Army, 19 March 1940; pt II Army to CIB Adelaide, 10 Feb. 1939; SA Police to CIB Canberra, 18 March 1938. When Italians manifested their resentment of the methods used by the consuls, they were often intimidated, such as that naturalised Italian in South Australia who, upon scoffing at a consular request, was warned by Amerio that 'if at any future date he were to travel to Italy, he may find himself in difficulties if he persisted in his attitude' (AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 23 June 1939).
- 89 AA, CRS A373, item 6230, Brisbane CIB Report, 3 Nov. 1943.
- 90 Il Giornale Italiano, 17 July 1935.
- 91 AA, CRS A373, item 6230, Albanese to Vaccari, 10 Feb. 1940.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid., Vaccari to Albanese, 3 and 11 May 1940.
- 94 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, CIB Adelaide Report, 9 Aug. 1938; also ibid., CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 5 May 1939. Before November 1937, when the Anti-Comintern Pact was signed, 'apparently following instructions from Berlin to act warily... Nazi-Fascist relations in Sydney were carried on more or less rather by personal contacts than through attendance at public or party functions' (AA, AP538/1, item SA20499, Security Service Report, 19 Jan. 1943).
- 95 AA, AP538/1, item SA20499, interviews with Fascio Secretaries at Loveday Camp, 5 Nov. 1943.
- 96 Ibid., CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 11 Nov. 1943.
- 97 Ibid., Security Service Report, 19 Jan. 1943.

- 98 Apparently Bianchi had 'some degree of influence' over Borsi (AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 158, CIB Melbourne to CIB Canberra, 23 March 1939; AA, CRS A373, item 6230, Vaccari to Albanese, 3 May 1940), and was on intimate terms with Nazi officials; in fact, when in June 1940 he was brought to the Tatura internment camp, he was greeted by the 'leading interned Nazis as a dear old friend, and immediately admitted into the inner ring running and controlling that camp' (AA, AP538/1, item SA20499, Security Service Report, 19 Jan. 1943).
- 99 See, for instance, Anzilotti's protest against an article published by Truth (AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 361, Anzilotti to Pearce, 25 March 1937); Mammalella's protest against an article of the Lithgow Mercury (ibid Mammalella to External Affairs, 6 Feb. 1940); again Mammalella against an article printed by the Bondi Daily, (ibid., Mammalella to External Affairs, 3 May 1940). Arrighi's protest against a play performed in Melbourne, allegedly containing remarks offensive to the Italian Army (AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 364, Arrighi to Lyons, 6 Feb. 1939).
 - 1 Il Giornale Italiano, 6 Oct. 1937; AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 5, Postmaster-General's Dept to External Affairs, 9 Nov. 1937.

2 Il Giornale Italiano, 28 July 1937.

- 3 AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Army Intelligence to HQ Southern Command, 27 June 1940. Rando arrived in Australia on 14 October 1922. For some considerable time he was on the staff of the consulate in Sydney, editor of the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia, secretary of the Sydney Fascio, councillor of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Sydney and, since 1937, Inspector of the Italian Fascists in Australia. Ironically, he had been given a most favourable report by the Sydney CIB which described him as a 'well educated, quiet spoken, gentlemanly class of man ... always prepared to co-operate with Commonwealth officials' (AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 152, CIB Sydney to CIB Canberra, 19 Feb. 1940).
- 4 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 152, Security Service Report, 17 March 1940.

5 Ibid., External Affairs to Army, 13 May 1940.

- 6 AA, CRS A461, item Q349/3/5, pt I, Prime Minister's Dept to Mrs E. Walters, 10 May 1939. 'The Government... is taking all possible steps to ensure that foreigners are not permitted to congregate to any appreciable extent in particular towns or centres'.
- 7 Ibid., Attorney-General's Dept to Prime Minister's Dept, 11 Oct. 1939.
- 8 AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 8 May 1940.
- 9 AA, MP729/6, item 22/401/65, Army Adelaide to Military Board, Melbourne, 17 April 1941; AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, Adelaide Police to F. C. McKay, 5 June 1940. There were more

than 200 Italians working on the Adelaide waterfront, about seventy per cent of the total labour force.

- 10 Felice Rando in particular was singled out by the Security Service, which closely followed his movements (AA, AP538/1, item SA3074, pt I, CIB Adelaide to CIB Canberra, 20 March 1940), and now considered him to be 'an enemy agent masquerading as a Consul...a Political Officer pure and simple' (AA, AP501/1 and 2, unnumbered file, Military Intelligence, Adelaide to HQ Southern Command, 27 June 1940).
- 11 AA, MP/729/6, item 22/401/65, Army to Attorney-General's Dept, 15 April 1940.
- 12 Ibid., item 22/401/68, Army Minute Paper, 10 May 1940.
- 13 Ibid. 'The detention of larger numbers would depend largely on local considerations and, to an extent, on the attitude of the British Subjects regarding the presence and property of Italians in the community'.
- 14 AA, CRS A433, item 45/2/2294, Gulargambone Graziers Association to J. Clark, 5 June 1940; AA, CRS A1608, item F39/2/3, pt I, 11th Light Horse Regiment, AIF to Prime Minister, 22 May 1940.
- 15 AA, MR729/6, item 22/401/68, Army Minute Paper, 10 May 1940.
- 16 AA, CRS A1608, item F39/2/3, pt I, Memorandum to Premier, 23 May 1940.
- 17 AA, MP729/6, item 22/401/104, Defence, Southern Command to Military Board, 15 July 1940.

5The Anti-Fascists

... we must remember our martyrs not only with speeches and flowers, but with guns, not like slaves, but like men. We must not celebrate, but avenge. A people that does not fight violence by means of violence, that bends its knees and cowardly tolerates the impositions of infamous mercenaries, is unworthy of such a name.

(Francesco Carmagnola, 20 June 1930)

Very little has been written up till now on the reception given to Fascism between 1922 and 1940 by Italian migrants settled in overseas countries such as the United States, Argentina and Australia, where they constituted sizable and politically important minorities. Even less is known of the opposition to the regime and to its ideology which sprang up amongst sections of these Italian communities abroad.

This chapter aims at drawing the general lines of the Italian resistance to Fascism as it occurred in Australia during the period between the two World Wars.

During the early 1920s Fascism was accepted by the greatest majority of the 20,000 Italian-born migrants residing in Australia because in the actions and the rhetoric of the new

government, they seemed to detect a new determination to defend their economic interests and political rights and to counter the threats posed to their religion, language and traditions by a largely hostile social and political environment.

The cause of Fascism did not gain the allegiance of all Italians in Australia. Although Fascism could count on the sympathy of a silent majority and on the vocal involvement of an articulate and educated elite, the opposition to the regime was in Australia a force by no means negligible. Its strength, as well as its weakness, lay in the fact that it came mainly from Italians who had seen the birth of Fascism in Italy and were militantly opposed to it; who had been persecuted for their ideals and compelled to emigrate after its coming to power. These Italians were predominatly industrial and agricultural workers from the northern part of the country and from the Po River valley. The bulk of them arrived in Australia between the years 1924 and 1926, and for this reason an organised anti-Fascist movement could not start in Australia before 1927. Before this, opposition to the regime was vented only on an individual level, mainly by sending letters and clippings from anti-Fascist newspapers to the Italo-Australian, the only Italian newspaper in Australia and notoriously pro-Fascist. Its editor. A. Folli, not only used to rebuke its authors. accusing them of being agents of Communism, but also sent their letters to the Italian consular authorities, in case the latter would deem it necessary to take action against the adversaries of Fascism.

Once in Australia, anti-Fascist Italians preferred to settle in areas where there was already a high concentration of their countrymen: in the canefields of northern Queensland, in the cities of Sydney and Melbourne, in the industrial and mineral centres of Corrimal, Wonthaggi, Lithgow, Broken Hill, Kalgoorlie, Boulder, Wiluna, in the agricultural areas of Griffith and Lismore. Their presence in the middle of communities which harboured also pro-Fascist elements sparked frequent clashes. In the cities, they lived in boarding houses, where after a day's work they met, played cards and bocce—Italian bowls—and discussed politics. On the whole, they preferred to congregate with people of the same village and region, with whom they had in common the same heritage,

culture, class and political affiliation.² Moreover, the new immigrants brought into the boarding houses the latest news from Italy, about the native village, the economic conditions which had compelled them to emigrate, the political situation and the determination of Fascism to make life difficult for the opposition.

These first-hand, emotional reports had a strong impact on the boarders who were in the main young, single and class conscious, and in this respect the boarding houses performed the function of centres of anti-Fascist political indoctrination and propaganda. The political activities and attempted conversion of Italians to the cause of anti-Fascism in these boarding houses were so widespread that they deeply worried the Fascist authorities, to the point that in 1927 the consulgeneral, Grossardi, wrote to the Prime Minister, Bruce, suggesting to him that it would be wise to keep some of them under police observation. Grossardi's intervention reflected the great apprehension of the Italian government for the anti-Fascist activities carried out by Italian emigrants.

The Duce not only personally resented the attacks on his regime by the Italian anti-Fascist press abroad, but was worried that anti-Fascism abroad could create the impression of a divided nation in which Fascism faced strong opposition. Mussolini recognised that anti-Fascist propaganda could hurt the image of the regime in foreign countries: it was necessary to minimise the strength of the opposition or, as he put it, 'above all to criticise behaviour [of] Italian renegades and to insist on almost unanimous - I stress unanimous - support of the Italian people for the Fascist Regime'.4 The consuls were instructed to fight anti-Fascism on all levels: by asking foreign governments to expel 'those Italian agitators who are most active and who work for the perversion of the working masses';5 by creating obstacles to the distribution of anti-Fascist newspapers; by organising a spy ring on the political activities of Italians abroad.7

The Italian authorities repeatedly boasted success in this field, as when in 1934 Piero Parini, the head of the *Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero*, claimed that Fascist party branches abroad had resisted the efforts of anti-Fascists to

sow dissent among Italians in foreign countries. Parini declared:

Anti-Fascism, with the assistance of the *fuorusciti*, set out to conquer the emigrants in order to bring Fascist Italy face to face with the moral drama of millions of Italians outside the frontiers declaredly opposed to the regime which had charge of the fate of their country,

but the campaign had failed.8

With reference to the history of anti-Fascism in Australia. Parini's claim is valid only in part. Although in a minority. Italian anti-Fascists in Australia remained a vocal and active group throughout the historical life of Fascism, and their achievements did not fall short altogether of their aims of denouncing to Australians and Italians the anti-democratic and tyrannical nature of Fascism, of exposing the falsehoods of Fascist propaganda and of halting the spread of Fascism among Italians in Australia. Although holding different political beliefs, the Italian Republicans, Socialists, Communists and Anarchists in Australia had in common their hatred for Fascism, even when they were divided by internal dissensions. The Anarchist movement was particularly strong in this country and owed its success to the remarkable activity of its leader, Francesco Carmagnola, Carmagnola asserted himself. as early as 1924, as leader of those anti-Fascists who advocated a strong line of action against Fascism. Born at San Vito Di Leguzzano (Vicenza) in 1900, during his military service between 1918 and 1921 he had been noted by the military authorities for his Anarchist beliefs. During these years he was stationed near Bologna, thus being able to witness the rise and deeds of Fascism: here he developed his hatred for the Fascists and his determination to fight them. In May 1922 he arrived in Australia and went to work in the canefields of northern Queensland. It is there that in March 1925 the first anti-Fascist demonstration in Australia occurred. When three Fascists from Mantua, who had been involved in beatings of anti-Fascists, arrived at Halifax, they were confronted by Carmagnola and other anti-Fascists, assaulted and forced to drink castor oil.9 The political climate was so tense in the areas of northern Queensland that all Fascists were 'treated as they treated anti-Fascists in Italy'10 and compelled to leave the area, so much so that the *Italo-Australian* lamented that 'the fact is that almost all Italians in North Queensland are bitter and irreconcilable enemies of Fascism'.¹¹

By 1926 the position of anti-Fascism in Australia had consolidated enough to give birth to the first political organisation, the *Lega Antifascista* (Anti-Fascist League), founded in Sydney by Frank Carmagnola at the end of that year. Financial contributions came also from the miners of Corrimal and Lithgow. The League could count on the support of approximately 300 people in Sydney and 100 at Corrimal and Lithgow.

beginning, the League printed leaflets and broadsheets and mailed them to Italians all over Australia. The response to this initiative was so favourable that Carmagnola and his friends were encouraged to publish a newspaper. The first issue of Il Risveglio appeared on 1 July 1927. One thousand copies were distributed among anti-Fascists and Italians. Although lacking an editorial, its program was clearly stated by its correspondents. Isidoro Bertazzon, in the article 'The lies of Fascism' quite openly advocated the struggle against Italian as well as international Fascism, while the anonymous author of the article 'From the land of Maramaldo' advocated the countering of Fascist violence in Italy with equal violence in Australia. The second number of the paper was issued on 1 August, and also contained appeals for international anti-Fascist solidarity and expressed 'its regret that Mussolini has not been killed in one of the attempts on his life' and 'the hope that Mussolini may be hung to a lamp post and with him all his followers'. 12 The third issue appeared on 1 September 1927 and enlarged on the themes of the previous issues: anti-Fascist, anti-capitalist, anti-religious and anti-monarchist articles figured prominently in its pages.

By this time the Italian authorities and the Fascists in the community were so incensed by the appearance of *Il Risveglio* that the consul-general deemed it necessary to make a representation to the Prime Minister, Bruce, against the appearance of the newspaper, 'a monthly publication of extremist character' which he considered: 'to be most dangerous, and

likely to inflame the minds of the Italians and cause a lot of trouble as it is openly inciting class warfare, Bolshevism, anarchy, violence and political murders'. ¹³ In the same letter the Italian consul-general went so far as to suggest to the Commonwealth government the legislation under which *Il Risveglio* could be banned.

The Bruce government, sensitive to all outcries of subversion, had in effect taken steps before the representation of the consul-general, in view of the fact that Il Risveglio was printed at the Communist Party's printery at Annandale, Sydney. 14 On 23 August the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor had already taken action by banning the publication of Il Risveglio and Francesco Carmagnola had been prosecuted and convicted to pay a fine of £3 or, in default, serve seven days' imprisonment. 15

Indeed, this episode as well as many others in the following years bear witness that before the advent of World War II, the cause of Italian anti-Fascism was regarded adversely by the Commonwealth government, which looked instead more favourably on the Fascists as representatives of law and order, of stability, of the Establishment.

Unmoved by the setback, the Anti-Fascist League started printing leaflets which were equally strongly worded against Fascism and its institutions, and distributed them to the Italian communities around Australia. Again, the consulgeneral wrote to the Prime Minister asking for their suppression. The Commonwealth Investigation Branch unsuccessfully attempted to trace where the actual printing was done, notwithstanding the fact that Grossardi had supplied names and addresses of anti-Fascist leaders. To

Anti-Fascism and Fascism in the meantime confronted each other with increasingly animosity. The Sydney vice-consul, Carosi, in July 1927 was compelled to go to Broken Hill to defuse the dangerous situation that had arisen between Fascist and anti-Fascist Italians. In September there was an Anarchist provocation during a picnic organised by the Fascists at Killarney, Sydney, while in Melbourne violence erupted between Fascists and anti-Fascists at Carlton, compelling the police to intervene and to separate the two

factions.²⁰ Also in 1927, in Adelaide, the sailors of the MV *Palermo* clashed with Italian anti-Fascists who were wearing red scarfs and singing the 'Red Flag' on the pier of Port Adelaide,²¹ and in Sydney the Anarchists demonstrated against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti by parading in the streets with flags and posters bearing the inscription 'Down with Mussolini, assassin of the Italian people'.²² The Fascist authorities, in order to counter the wave of anti-Fascism, in particular the influence of *Il Risveglio*, in September 1927 issued *Il Littorio*, as a vehicle of propaganda and anti-propaganda.²³

Yet the most significant event of that year was the opening in Melbourne of an anti-Fascist club, the Matteotti Club. Under Francesco Carmagnola as secretary and Tommaso Saviane as president, the club attracted all anti-Fascist Italians whatever their political allegiance. After only one year of life, the number of its members had increased so much that the club had to move from its small premises in Spring Street to larger ones near the Trades Hall in Victoria Street. Its membership amounted to approximately 600 subscriptions. The Matteotti Club functioned as the main centre for the diffusion of anti-Fascism and of ideals of class solidarity. Financially, the club supported itself with the money collected from newspaper subscriptions, membership fees, profits from the dance evenings that were held three times a week. donations from workers and from anonymous people. These funds were used to finance the diffusion all around Australia of anti-Fascist and Anarchist literature and to support Italians when they were on strike; also, money was sent (sometimes in large quantities - hundreds of pounds) to France, in order to pay the legal costs of the trials against anti-Fascists. As early as 1928 Carmagnola had tried to obtain permission from the Commonwealth government to print another newspaper, La Riscossa, but he had been refused by the Prime Minister. 24 Not until November 1929 was permission granted to the secretary of the Matteotti Club to publish La Riscossa. 25 The appearance of the newspaper gave new impetus to the cause of anti-Fascism in Australia. Three thousand copies were printed monthly or fortnightly according to the funds available and distributed throughout the country by Carmagnola's agents.

They were also distributing other anti-Fascist literature which the Matteotti Club was sending them, mainly the leading Anarchist newspapers from Paris, New York and Buenos Aires.

The Matteotti Club 'tried to make Australians aware that there were Italians against Fascism'.26 but could not claim much progress in this direction; instead it succeeded in raising the Fascists' anger. The more militant of them were so annoyed by the club's activities that some squadrists offered their services to Battistessa, the doven of the Italian squadrists in Australia, to storm the Matteotti Club and to destroy all vestiges of La Riscossa;27 others, such as Vittorio Tabacchi, prominent Melbourne Fascist, expressed their animosity by throwing bricks through the club's windows.28 Fascists were not the only ones to watch over the club's activities: the police also kept it under close surveillance. In October 1930, detectives of the CIB raided the club and seized propaganda leaflets, literature and a flag with the writing 'Down with Mussolini, assassin of the Italian people'.29 They also arrested the custodian, Valentino Ciotti, for unlawful possession of a loaded gun and a knife; he was later found guilty and fined £5.30

The year 1928 saw the rise to prominence in the anti-Fascist circles of Australia of a remarkable man. Omero Schiassi.31 A militant Socialist, he had been an intimate friend of Giacomo Matteotti and also of Mussolini, when the latter was a Socialist, His Socialism was so radical and uncompromising that it was often confused with Communism by friends and foes. The reason for this lies perhaps in the fact that Schiassi maintained contacts with the whole spectrum of anti-Fascism in Australia and overseas, including the Communist party of Italy in exile. In Melbourne in 1928 he formed the Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia, of which he became president. This organisation performed its task mainly by distributing anti-Fascist propaganda material to influential people, institutions and government departments. Schiassi used to send, to many ministers, anti-Fascist newspapers containing articles denouncing the manoeuvres of Fascism abroad. The Concentration was a branch of the Anti-Fascist Concentration based in Paris. Its importance was both:

political and moral: to demonstrate, to witness to the world that not all Italians were Fascists or had bent to Fascism ... 'to make its voice heard, countering systematically Fascist propaganda and letting the world know what was the real situation in Italy; to be the point of reference of all democratic anti-Fascist forces'. 32

In short, the same goals as the Matteotti Club and the Anarchists. At the beginning there was some collaboration between Schiassi and his Concentration and Carmagnola, Bertazzon and other Anarchists, although neither the Communists nor the Anarchists formally joined the Anti-Fascist Concentration either in France or in Australia.³³

The outstanding achievement of this short collaboration was the commemoration of Matteotti, held at the New Gaiety Theatre, Melbourne, on 10 June, 1928. Soon after this ceremony the collaboration between the two anti-Fascist groups ceased. The split was caused by ideological differences, by a quarrel between Schiassi and Bertazzon,³⁴ by the fact that, although Schiassi exercised considerable influence among anti-Fascist Italians, his anti-Fascism was expressed largely by rhetoric, whereas the supporters of the Matteotti Club wanted action, not just words; they sought confrontations with the Fascists, and to this purpose went around in clubs and public places, armed with guns and iron bars, provoking Fascists to fight. On 2 February 1929, when the first talking picture was screened at the Auditorium in Melbourne, showing an address by Mussolini to the American people, Carmagnola and few dozen anti-Fascists disrupted the show. Similar disturbances were staged during the visit of Father Salza, an agent of Fascist propaganda. At Ingham, in November 1928, anti-Fascists gathered outside the building where he was lecturing and threw stones on the tin roof thus causing panic among the audience.35 When Father Salza lectured at the Australian Hall in Sydney, about thirty anti-Fascists attempted to disrupt the meeting, but were confronted by the Fascists and thrown out. 36 In August, when the Italian consul, Count di San Marzano, visited Innisfail, the anti-Fascists plastered the walls and fences of the town with posters denouncing his visit.37

Yet the most remarkable incident of that year was what was

later called by the anti-Fascists the Russell Street fight. On 27 October 1929, while 100 to 150 of Melbourne's Fascists, all wearing their black shirts, were celebrating at the Temperance Hall in Russell Street the seventh anniversary of the March on Rome, they were attacked by Carmagnola and his men who rushed into the hall and took them by surprise. Before they realised what was happening, several Fascists were injured.³⁸

The news of the fight quickly reached Sydney: the impact on the local Fascists was such that many did not attend the local celebration of the March on Rome, held on 29 October, in fear of a similar attack from Sydney anti-Fascists, and many of those who were present at the celebration refrained from wearing the black shirt.³⁹

The year 1930 witnessed a toughening of the anti-Fascist positions. In January, anti-Fascist Italians at Corrinal demanded that the management of the local mines dismiss an Italian who admitted being a member of the Fascist Party. At Coalcliff Italian workers, suspected of belonging to the Fascist Party, were closely questioned and allowed to continue to work only when their 'innocence' was proved. 40 In February, in a letter to the All Australian Trade Union Congress. Carmagnola charged the Italian consuls in Australia with being 'actively engaged in organising strike breakers by forcing Italian workmen to accept work at less than award rates of pay'. The secretary of the Matteotti Club went on to claim that the consuls had given advice to unemployed Italians to accept the jobs of Australians, while the latter were on strike. The letter added: 'Any Italian worker who disregards the advice is put on the list of anti-Fascists, and the Government of Italy advised, which leads to the persecution of any relatives or friends in Italy'.41 In March Schiassi extended his activities to New Zealand by nominating a sympathiser, Umberto Colonna, as New Zealand representative of the Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia. 42 On May Day, Italian anti-Fascists paraded in red shirts along with all labour organisations, carrying banners and posters condemning Fascism.⁴³ Carmagnola's capacity for succeeding in arousing the Fascists' temper was demonstrated when in December 1930 he sent to the Prime Minister, Scullin, who was in Rome on an official state visit, a cablegram asking him to lay a wreath on Matteotti's grave. 44

But in 1930 there also occurred the most serious and in fact irreparable crisis within the anti-Fascist movement. Hit by the Depression, many anti-Fascists were unable to subscribe to La Riscossa or to pay the membership fee of one guinea to the Matteotti Club. Rivalries between Carmagnola and Bertazzon as well as economic difficulties split the anti-Fascist movement and Bertazzon was expelled from the Matteotti Club. On 14 June 1930 he started the publication of another fortnightly paper, L'Avanguardia Libertaria, which was of strong Anarchist inspiration, and continued publishing it up to 15 November 1932; meanwhile Carmagnola was still issuing La Riscossa in Melbourne, up to the second half of 1931. During this period the two groups advanced on the path of self-destruction by viciously attacking each other. By the end of 1931 the split had reached its logical conclusion: La Riscossa ceased publishing and the Matteotti Club declined in influence until it was finally closed in December 1933; Carmagnola returned to North Queensland where he found work on a tobacco farm and still continued to publish La Riscossa from Ingham, although in a reduced format. In Melbourne, after the collapse of the Anarchist front, Schiassi and Simeoni attempted to regroup the anti-Fascists by founding the Casa d'Italia, a club that was supposed to take the place of the Matteotti Club (as well as being Schiassi's answer to the proposed Fascist Casa d'Italia), but its activities were limited by the political and economic realities of those years.45

Carmagnola at Ingham continued to harass Fascism and Fascists. On 26 December 1931 he and two other anti-Fascists, Tommaso Saviane and Mario Tardiani, abused and assaulted the Italian consul of Townsville, Mario Melano, beat him and ripped from his coat his Fascist Party badge. Later on the same day, a group of forty anti-Fascists stormed the hotel where Melano was staying and threw a glass at him. Carmagnola and Tardiani were charged with unlawful assault and granted bail of £120.46 The trial was held at the Supreme Court at Townsville on 11 and 12 February 1932. Although the police testified against Tardiani who, in the words of Constable

Still, 'had been causing a lot of trouble lately', and against the evidence of the facts, ⁴⁷ the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. ⁴⁸

This victory did not bear any fruits. By the end of the year the anti-Fascist movement in Australia had disappeared as an effective, aggressive force. To mark its doom, the Commonwealth government on 10 November, 1932, took steps for the suppression of the two publications printed in Australia in the Italian language under the titles La Riscossa and L'Avanguardia Libertaria'. 49

Without press, without effective clubs, the anti-Fascist movement between the years 1933 and 1940 made its presence felt only sporadically. Even Italian aggression in Abyssinia did not revive the anti-Fascist movement. On the contrary, some anti-Fascists switched their alliance at the time of the sanctions against Italy, because they personally felt the hatred of sections of the Australian community that did not distinguish between Italian Fascists and anti-Fascists. Many miners at Wiluna, Western Australia, who up to then had been staunch enemies of the regime, in 1936 greeted the Fascist consul of Perth, N. Costantino, with cries of 'Viva il Fascismo'. 50

Opposition to the regime became again a personal act of defiance, of emotional and sometimes violent reaction to specific issues or events. Amongst the few of these outbursts worth remembering is the one that occurred in December 1934 at Ingham, during the visit of the Italian consul-general, Marquis Agostino Ferrante. On that occasion, Italian anti-Fascists printed propaganda leaflets against his coming, and the consul-general had to be granted police protection for the duration of his stay at Ingham. In the same township, a year later, an invalid, Bruno Rossi, who — either imprudently or absent-mindedly — entered the local hotel with the Fascist Party badge in the lapel of his coat, was beaten up with his own crutches.

The most important manifestation of anti-Fascism in the second half of the 1930s occurred in Melbourne. In 1938 Carmagnola organised the distribution of anti-Fascist propaganda aboard Italian ships. Leaflets were planted on the MV *Remo*, and the Fascist authorities increased their efforts

to catch the culprits. When the Italian cruiser Raimondo Montecuccoli arrived in Melbourne in February 1938, its sailors were approached and given newspapers and propaganda leaflets. The second in command of the Montecuccoli, Captain Santo Bondi, had already 'addressed the crew on the of the anti-Fascist literature and suggested provocatively the manner in which the distributors should be dealt with'.58 The sailors were quick to put into practice the commanding officer's advice. On 15 February they thought they recognised among the visitors to the cruiser an anti-Fascist involved in the distribution of literature hostile to the regime. The man, an Italian taxi driver, was savagely beaten up, then questioned by the ship's commander about his political beliefs and allowed to go free only after he swore he had not been involved in the distribution of anti-Fascist propaganda material.54

The brutality of the assault incensed the anti-Fascist circles and the population of Melbourne. On 17 February a huge demonstration took place at Port Melbourne. Over 12,000 people and 2,000 cars assembled in front of the cruiser, while 100 police blocked the pier, and the crew of the *Montecuccoli*, who had been refused shore leave, patrolled brightly lit decks, fearing an attack. An effigy of Mussolini was burnt while the crowd was addressed by Francesco Carmagnola. The police also took the precaution of posting guards inside and outside the Italian consulate. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, W. M. Hughes, even spoke of demanding apologies and compensation from the Italian government, but after cabinet discussion, no such demand was sent. 66

The rally against the *Montecuccoli* incident was the last big anti-Fascist demonstration held in Australia. By 1939 the clouds of war were approaching fast, and the indiscriminate hostility against Italians amongst Australians at large made any anti-Fascist activity impossible and also pointless. Carmagnola, who by then had a pie shop in Sydney, tried to make the point that Italian anti-Fascists too were fighting Mussolini and what he stood for. He distributed posters carrying the writing 'Not all Italians are Fascists' and a list of anti-Fascist activities held during the preceding years. But to no avail. When war broke out, all Italians, Fascists or anti-

Fascists, naturalised or not, were caught in the whirlwind of hate and many of them were interned.

Before drawing up a balance sheet of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia during the years 1922 to 1940, it is necessary to evaluate the obstacles and difficulties encountered by the movement.

In the first place, anti-Fascism had the disability of fighting a doctrine which ascribed to itself the right of being the sole dispenser of patriotism. Fascism appealed quite successfully to the unsophisticated, scarcely educated migrants, who were linguistically and socially insecure and isolated, targets of discrimination and abuse. Although, as Gaetano Salvemini lamented, 'ninety-eight per cent know nothing about politics and do not want to know about it', 57 Italians abroad in general and in Australia in particular fell for the Fascist rhetoric, the ceremonies, the speeches, the trappings of the regime, for its aggressive and bombastic style. Italian anti-Fascists, much as they declared that they: 'were not, as the Fascists claimed, anti-Italian, but were more Italian than they, only [they] were for an Italy as Mazzini and Garibaldi wanted it, for a Republican Italy', were not believed. 58

Secondly, anti-Fascism had to fight with limited means a subtle. efficient and well financed Fascist propaganda machine. The Fascist consuls, the secretaries of the Fascist branches, the Italian press, the clubs, all diligently carried out the Italian government's policy towards anti-Fascism: Italians were warned not to finance anti-Fascist newspapers such as Il Risveglio. 59 and the anti-Fascists were threatened with being deported to Italy. Moreover, the consuls' duty was to maintain a close surveillance of all anti-Fascists already in Australia and to prevent the landing on this continent of more of them. 60 Anti-Fascists were denied membership of the 'national' clubs such as the Club Cavour in Melbourne, because of their 'antinational' activities.61 They were discriminated against by Italian employers and businessmen who, having to rely on the good offices of the Italian authorities for obtaining import licences of goods from Italy, were forced by circumstances to declare their allegiance to Fascism. 62 With the passing of the years, the effects of Fascist propaganda became obvious: many anti-Fascists, frustrated by years of activities that seemed to them to be leading nowhere, deserted the anti-Fascist ranks and Fascist propaganda reaped its fruits even among its opponents.

The third factor which hampered the progress of the anti-Fascist cause was the narrow base of support which the movement enjoyed. Outside general links with the Communist Party of Australia and the Trade Union movement, during the 1920s Italian anti-Fascism in this country was politically isolated, both nationally and internationally. Allegations made by the Fascist authorities that the enemies of Fascism in Australia were acting under orders from international Communism cannot be corroborated by any evidence. It is nevertheless true that the Central Committee of the Communist International tried to establish a liaison with the local Italian anti-Fascists and to increase the distribution in Australia of its propaganda material. In a letter to the Secretariat of the Italian Communist Party, Angelo Tasca ('Rienzi'), the delegate of the PCI to the Communist International, informed his superiors that:

The Comintern asked us whether we have an individual to send to Australia to organise the Italians migrated in that continent ... we have also spoken about sending there literature in the Italian language ... but in this respect things look rather gloomy ... a large diffusion of our literature in the Italian language down there has poor chances. We must nevertheless try 63

Soon after, Palmiro Togliatti ('Ercoli') replied to Tasca that 'we have not, now, an Italian available to be sent to Australia' thus renouncing, at this stage, the possibility of influencing directly the Italian anti-Fascist movement in Australia. A direct contact would be established in the 1930s. 65

Moreover, because of their inability to work harmoniously together and to present a united front against Fascism, the Italian anti-Fascists scattered their meagre intellectual and financial resources and weakened the political effectiveness of their activity.

Furthermore, the anti-Fascists had to face hostile public opinion: their internationalism, their class consciousness, the advocacy of violence, alienated and isolated them from the majority of the population. They 'were believed to be what the Fascists and the Consuls said [they] were: Communists, troublemakers, dangerous people; instead, [they] were only poor immigrants who came here to improve [their] conditions'. 66 Anti-Fascists were frequently warned, 'in their interest, to abstain from provoking further public disorders and from bringing into Australia their political wrangles and national divisions'. 67 Missing completely all ideological implications and historical realities, Australians believed that the place for Italians to settle their quarrels was Rome, and not Sydney or Melbourne.

Finally, an important obstacle met by the opposition to Fascism was the absence in its ranks — with the exception of Schiassi — of an educated élite, of an intellectual leadership. In Australia there were no *fuorusciti* as in France or the United States, who could be at the fore of an articulate and informed opposition; instead, here, the character of Italian anti-Fascism was brisk, rough and libellous.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, and although they could not claim great victories to their credit, the importance of the Italian resistance to Fascism in Australia is undeniable.

Morally they made the point that Fascism had not succeeded in bending to its will all Italians, but that its values and methods were questioned and rejected even by humble and simple people. They made it clear that intimidation and violence could not alter their resolution to fight Fascism to the end, even in the worst possible conditions.

In practical terms, anti-Fascist activities and propaganda, even if they failed in their goal of convincing Australians that Fascism was a political and moral doctrine which ought to be impeached publicly in the eyes of the world, succeeded in halting the spread of Fascism among Italians in Australia. The popularity and the determination of anti-Fascism at centres such as Ingham, Innisfail, Halifax, Mourilyan, Corrimal, Lithgow, Broken Hill, Wiluna, Kalgoorlie, deterred the Fascists from adopting a hard-line policy of indoctrination, because they knew that eventually their violence would be met with equal violence. Thus many conflicts which could have had tragic and bloody consequences were avoided in Australia.

Notes

- 1 The first full-scale study on the impact of Fascism in America is Diggins. Mussolini and Fascism.
- While the boarding houses were the exclusive meeting point for anti-Fascist working-class Italians, the supporters of Fascism (the employees of the Lloyd Sabaudo Shipping Agency, of the Italian newspapers, the businessmen, traders, greengrocers and in general the members of the Italian Establishment) congregated in clubs such as the Circolo Isole Eolie and the Club Italia in Sydney, or the Club Cavour in Melbourne.
- 3 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Grossardi to Bruce, 19 Sept. 1927.
- 4 DDI, Series VI, Vol. IV, Doc. 178, Mussolini to Preziosi, 17 Feb. 1925
- 5 DDI, Series VII, Vol. II, Doc. 71, Romano Avezzana to Mussolini. 6 June 1923.
- 6 Ibid., Vol. IV, Doc. 210, Mussolini to Romano Avezzana, 27 Dec. 1925.
- 7 Ibid., Doc. 306, Grandi to Representatives abroad, 23 April 1926.
- 8 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, Murray to Sir John Simon, 29 Nov. 1934.
- 9 Italo-Australian, 14 March 1925. It was a notorious Fascist practice to compel their political opponents to drink castor oil in order to be 'purged' of their 'subversive' ideas.
- 10 Francesco Carmagnola, interview, 18 Sept. 1971.
- 11 Italo-Australian, 14 March 1925.
- 12 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Grossardi to Bruce, 19 Sept. 1927.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., Premier to Bruce, 3 Nov. 1927.
- 15 Ibid., Bruce to Grossardi, 14 Oct. 1927.
- 16 Ibid., Grossardi to Bruce, 2 Dec. 1927.
- 17 Ibid., Attorney General to Prime Minister, 16 April 1928.
- 18 Italo-Australian, 6 July 1927.
- 19 Ibid., 28 Sept. 1927.
- 20 Il Risveglio, 1 Sept. 1927.
- 21 Tommaso Saviane, interview, 7 Nov. 1971.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Italo-Australian, 5 Oct. 1927.
- 24 AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12 External Affairs Opinion No. 9.
- 25 Ibid., list of newspapers published in foreign languages in Australia.
- 26 Saviane, interview.
- 27 Italo-Australian, 11 Oct. 1930.
- 28 Carmagnola, interview.

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- 29 Italo-Australian, 25 Oct. 1930.
- 30 Ibid., 8 Nov. 1930.
- 31 On him, see chap. 10.
- 32 De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II, pp. 460-1.
- 33 USNAID, T586/1122/074457.
- 34 Saviane, interview.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Italo-Australian, 2 March 1929.
- 37 Argus, 26 Aug. 1929; Italo-Australian, 31 Aug. 1929.
- 38 Argus, 29 Oct. 1929; Sydney Morning Herald, 28 Oct. 1929; Italo-Australian, 2 Nov. 1929.
- 39 Italo-Australian, 2 Nov. 1929.
- 40 Ibid., 25 Jan. 1930.
- 41 Argus, 1 March 1930. Evidence shows that consuls were threatening migrants with reprisals against their relatives still resident in Italy if they did not conform to the Fascist Party's wishes. On this, see Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, pp. 102-4, and La Riscossa, 21 July 1931, p. 4.
- 42 Italo-Australian, 8 March 1930.
- 43 Ibid., 17 May 1930; Saviane, interview.
- 44 Daily Guardian, 10 Dec. 1930; Italo-Australian, 13 Dec. 1930.
- 45 Carmagnola, interview.
- 46 Brisbane Courier, 14 Jan. 1932.
- 47 Ibid., 12 Feb. 1932.
- 48 Ibid., 13 Feb. 1932.
- 49 AA, CRS A445, item 232/4/12, Postmaster-General to Prime Minister, 10 Nov. 1932.
- 50 Napoleone Costantino, interview, 17 May 1972.
- 51 Workers' Weekly, 21 Dec. 1934.
- 52 Saviane, interview.
- 53 Workers' Weekly, 8 Feb. 1938.
- 54 AA, CRS A432, item 1938/147, Police report to Attorney-General, 16 Feb. 1938.
- 55 Ibid., CIB Melbourne to CIB Canberra, 17-18 Feb. 1938; Canberra Times, 18 Feb. 1938; Workers' Weekly, 22 Feb. 1938.
- 56 Workers' Weekly, 1 March, 8 March 1938; on the incident see also Ralph Gibson, My Years in the Communist Party, Morningside, Qld, 1966, p. 65; E. M. Andrews, Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia, Canberra, 1970, pp. 109-10.
- 57 See Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism, p. 142.
- 58 Saviane, interview.
- 59 Italo-Australian, 27 June 1927.
- 60 Ibid., 12 Oct. 1927.
- 61 Ibid., 16 Nov. 1929.
- 62 Anti-Fascists were not accepted as canecutters in the gangs hired by Italian cane farmers (Saviane, interview).
- 63 Italian Communist Party Achives (hereafter APC), 673/144, Tasca to PCI Secretariat, 1 Nov. 1928.



Plate I Above: Italians giving the Fascist salute during the foundation ceremony of the first official Fascist Branch in Melbourne on 31 October 1926

Plate II Below: Anti-Fascist Italians of the *Italia Libera* movement, some in Australian Army uniform, parade through the streets of Melbourne at the end of the war





Plate III Above: Omero Schiassi, in black suit and hat behind the flag, leads the Italian contingent of Melbourne in the May Day procession in 1945

Plate IV Below: Carosi and the leaders of the Italian associations in Sydney give the Fascist salute after placing a wreath on the Cenotaph on 4 November 1929, Italian Armistice Day



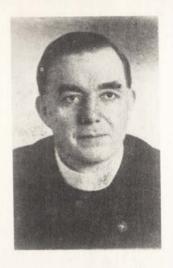




Plate V Above left: Father Ugo Modotti, S. J.

Plate VI Above right: Consul-General Paolo Vita-Finzi

Plate VII Below: Frank Carmagnola addresses the participants in a political rally at the Matteotti Club. Presiding at the table is Don Cameron





Plate VIII Above:Franco Battistessa in 1927

Plate IX Below: The founders of the first unofficial Fascist Branch in Melbourne on 17 October 1925. Eustacchio Del Pin is fourth from the right







Plate X Above left: Consul-General Amedeo Mammalella

Plate XI Above right: Consul-General Agostino Ferrante

Plate XII Below :Members of the *Italia Libera* in Melbourne crating clothes collected by the Australian Relief for Italy (ARI), to be sent to the Italian people in 1945





Plate XIII Above: Anti-Fascist Italians of the Matteotti Club in Melbourne after the May Day March in 1927. Standing on the extreme left is Isidoro Bertazzon, on the extreme right, Frank Carmagnola

Plate XIV Below: Italian children of the *Balilla* and *Piccole Italiene* organisation of Sydney in 1934. Last on the right is *Fascio* Secretary, Felice Rando

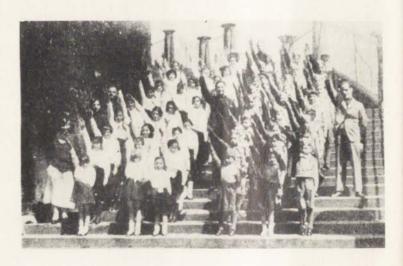






Plate XV Above left: First issue of $\it Il\ Risveglio$, printed in Sydney in July 1927

Plate XVI Above right: Consul-General A. Grossardi addresses a Fascist rally in Melbourne in 1926

Plate XVII Below: Italian ex-servicemen marching during Anzac Day in Sydney in 1937. Third from the right is Antonio Baccarini







Plate XVIII Above left: Francisco Fantin

Plate XIX Above right: Diploma of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, bearing Fascist insignia and dated according to the Fascist calendar, distributed to Italian internees at the Loveday Internment Camp in 1942

Plate XX Below: Anti-Fascist posters, mounted on a lorry and paraded through the streets of Melbourne by the Italian Group Against War and Fascism during the years of the Spanish Civil War



- APC, 673/168, Togliatti to Tasca, 27 Dec. 1928. See Chap. 6. Carmagnola, interview. Italo-Australian, 28 March 1925.

Anti-Fascism and Communism before World War II

The hatred caused by wars, and by this one in particular, attracts to their country, which is in war against England, all people who have never been militant and who feel and understand nothing and who have no interest in social problems.

(Francesco Carmagnola, 13 November 1941)

While during the 1920s Communism did not exercise any worthwhile influence amongst Italian anti-Fascists in Australia, in the 1930s its impact on them was important, by reason of the change in policy of the Communist International towards Fascism. It was then that Fascism, and not Social-Democracy, was recognised as the real enemy, and the Communist Parties were directed to work for the defeat of Fascism by forming alliances with other left-wing organisations, a collaboration which reached its peak at the time of the popular fronts.

How great was Communism's ascendancy over the Italian community in Australia and, in particular, within the anti-Fascist movement? A report drafted in 1944 by an ex-Fascist businessman, G. Vaccari, claims that the Italian Communists

were relatively few and that their influence was small. According to him, in June 1940, the Communists amounted in all to about 200, out of which about 150 were nominal, forty were actual Communists but not militant, and only ten were militant. The vast majority of Italians, about 123,000, were, as Vaccari put it:

satisfied with the Australian democratic liberal order and therefore refractory to autocratic totalitarian systems. Not belonging to extreme parties in Australia (i.e. non Fascist, non Communist nor self-declared anti-Fascist). Sympathising with the legitimate national aspirations of Italy such as independence, order, tolerance, welfare, but disinterested in Italian politics.¹

Although the reasons given by Vaccari to explain Italians' reluctance to commit themselves to a political ideology must be contested, his figures on the Communists' strength are basically correct: yet the Communist contribution to the anti-Fascist struggle went well beyond their numbers.

The collapse, at the end of 1932, of the anti-Fascist organisations which had their raison d'être in the social and political activities of the Matteotti Club and in publishing the newspapers La Riscossa and L'Avanguardia Libertaria, was a serious blow to the opponents of Fascism. The Anarchists, who until that year had been the driving force behind all political initiatives aiming at rallying the Italian community in Australia to a policy of opposition against the Italian government, never recovered from their factional fights and from the economic consequences of the Depression which destroyed the movement.

The need to fill the political vacuum which ensued was soon felt by many anti-Fascists, who began to look around for alternative leaders who could replace the Anarchists Carmagnola and Bertazzon, gone to North Queensland and to New South Wales. The Italian anti-Fascists, unable to create a new political movement on the ruins of the Matteotti Club, unable to find a new leader who could bring them together, began to feel strongly attracted to the Australian political movements and parties which were most vocal in their opposition to Fascism, and which could offer them the opportunity of carrying on with their struggle. They joined the

Labor Party and the Communist Party, or were militant members of the Trade Union movement or of any organisation in which they could find an identity of aims.

Soon Communism became the most attractive single force of the Australian political system, not only because the Communist Party of Australia in the past had often supported the anti-Fascist movement and lent to Italian anti-Fascists its facilities, such as printing presses and halls, but mainly because it was the brother-party of the Italian Communist Party in exile, the only Italian party which survived the Fascist totalitarian onslaught and in the 1930s still operated an efficient network of underground contacts all over the world through which anti-Fascist propaganda was distributed to the masses of Italian migrants and political refugees abroad.

To Italian anti-Fascists in Australia, Communism was attractive for what it offered: an organisation to rely upon; political guidance; a source of information on the development of international anti-Fascist movements and activities; a wealth of readily available propaganda material in the Italian language. But Italians of Communist, Republican, Socialist, Populist and Anarchist faiths soon felt that they could not rely exclusively on Australian political institutions but that they ought to express their own political identity by forming an autonomous group which would have as its distinguishing aim the struggle against Italian Fascism and against its representatives and supporters in Australia.

This project was realised in Melbourne in 1934 by a handful of people, among whom were the outstanding figures of Luigi Stellato, a Calabrian fruit and vegetable market agent, holding strong pacifist ideas, and Matteo Cristofaro, who became the leader of Italian Communists in Australia.

Born at San Marco in Lamis, in the province of Foggia, in the southern Italian region of Puglie in 1908, Matteo Cristofaro had been influenced by his father's Socialist beliefs and at an early age became a member of the Communist Youth League. He witnessed the Fascists' violence in his own village, where some Socialists were beaten up and one was shot. For economic as well as political reasons he migrated to Australia, where he arrived in Melbourne in February 1927. For a few years he worked in the Victorian countryside, taking up any

job which was available: harvesting beans, digging beetroots, picking fruit and tomatoes, cutting trees, clearing forests, building roads.³

In 1931 he came to Melbourne and began working at the Victoria Markets as an agent. Here he was approached by other fruit marketers who introduced him to the anti-Fascist movement. For a short while he frequented the Matteotti Club, where he read the Anarchist press. He improved his political education by spending his nights at the State Library of Victoria and by going to the Yarra Bank, where he attentively listened to the speeches of J. W. Fleming, the Anarchist, Socialist speakers and to the Communist Dr G. P. O'Day. He called the Yarra Bank meetings 'my University'. At the end of 1931 he joined the Communist Party of Australia and was assigned to the North Melbourne area, where he carried out useful propaganda work and acquired valuable experience.

In 1934 Cristofaro was asked by Luigi Stellato to attend a meeting of Italians at Rathdowne Street, Melbourne, Eighteen people took part. They represented all shades of anti-Fascist political opinion. It was then decided to form the Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra (Italian Group Against War). Giovanni Corso was elected president of the group, and Matteo Cristofaro secretary, while members of the committee were Angelo Coladetti, who had been active in the Matteotti Club and was one of the protagonists of the Russell Street fight: Ottavio Brida, a carpenter from the province of Trento; Boris Franceschini, an Anarchist from the Matteotti Club; and Luigi Stellato. Giovanni Corso and Ottavio Brida later joined the Communist Party. The aim of the group was to oppose the expansion of Fascism's influence among Italians in Australia; to attract all people who previously belonged to or frequented the Matteotti Club and bring them together into a militant organisation; and, as Cristofaro quickly realised, to gather the best elements of Italian anti-Fascism for the Communist Party.7 The name chosen shows that Cristofaro was already well acquainted with and influenced by the demonstrations of political opposition to Fascism taking place abroad, and that he was already receiving from various sources a great deal of anti-Fascist literature which enabled him to have up-to-date information on the strength and activities of anti-Fascism overseas. The Amsterdam World Congress Against War, organised by the French writers Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, and from which the first World Committee Against War was set up, was not held until August 1932, while national and state Councils Against War and Fascism were formed throughout Australia in 1933.8

The Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra became affiliated with them. The group was involved in all activities promoted by the Communist Party of Australia and other left-wing organisations: when Egon Irwin Kisch, a Czech writer and delegate to the second National Congress Against War and Fascism in Melbourne, was refused landing by the Lyons government in 1934 and later on was arrested for illegally entering the Commonwealth, the Gruppo Italiano assembled almost 300 Italians who took part along with members of the Victorian Council Against War and Fascism in antigovernment demonstrations.9 By the end of 1934 the Gruppo included approximately forty militants, a dozen of whom were also members of the Communist Party of Australia. 10 The Communists, by far the most active in the Gruppo, met under the ideological supervision of Ralph Gibson, then a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, who was present at their weekly meetings and counselled on the political line which they ought to follow: the motions carried by the Communists were then put forward to the whole membership of the $Gruppo\ Italiano\$ and discussed. 11

By 1932 Matteo Cristofaro had begun corresponding with the Italian Communist Party in exile in Paris and was sent propaganda material and books. He received and distributed the party's theoretical magazine Stato Operaio; he raised subscriptions to the newspapers L'Idea Popolare, L'Unità, Il Grido del Popolo, La Voce degli Italiani, and sold a host of pamphlets and booklets supplied by the Editions de Culture Sociale of Paris. Between 1932 and 1940 hundreds of pounds were spent by Italians in Australia in subscribing to and purchasing Communist literature in the Italian language and these sums were remitted to the Italian Communist Party by Matteo Cristofaro.

The propaganda material received from overseas supplemented the small amount of anti-Fascist literature

printed in Australia. After the disappearance of the two Anarchist newspapers, the anti-Fascist movement was unable, throughout the 1930s, to publish another newspaper. With the exception of Dr Schiassi, who, urged by Cristofaro to begin a newspaper, refused, there was no other person in the *Gruppo Italiano* or in the anti-Fascist community intellectually prepared to organise any relevant publishing activity.

Between 1935 and 1940 the *Gruppo Italiano* printed only leaflets and small pamphlets illustrating its opposition to specific actions of the Fascist government. Matteo Cristofaro especially deeply regretted the absence of a cultured and active organiser, and in 1935 he asked the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party to send to Australia an experienced man who could be assigned to this task. Ruggero Grieco replied that Vittorio Vidali, the Communist leader from Trieste, was available if the *Gruppo* would find employment for him or provide for his maintenance. Cristofaro, although prepared to meet Grieco's request, was unable to obtain an entry visa for Vidali and the whole plan was dropped. 12

The Italo-Abyssinian conflict boosted the political activities of the *Gruppo Italiano*. The African war persuaded many Italians, in Italy as well as in Australia, to rally in support of the Fascist regime, but was also the catalyst which prompted the anti-Fascist movement to action. For the first time Italian Fascism was showing its aggressive, imperialist nature, which the *Gruppo* had repeatedly denounced in the past. At the beginning of 1935 the group's name was changed to *Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra e il Fascismo* (Italian Group Against War and Fascism), and its committee was enlarged to nine members, the new ones being Guido Canteri, Ruggero Vinco, Carlo Simeoni, Paolo De Angelis and Giuseppe Poli. 13

On May Day 1935 the *Gruppo Italiano* denounced the capitalist nature of Italy's colonial claims and appealed to all Italian workers to form a united front against war and Fascism. In a memorable leaflet Italians in Melbourne were warned that Fascism was preparing for war against Abyssinia and were urged to deny men and money which the Fascist authorities in Australia were then trying to raise for Fascism's African ventures. In July the president of the Italian Group Against War of North Melbourne, A. Vanzini, denounced

Italian aggression against Abyssinia and promised to 'influence the Italian people in Australia into registering their protest against the new massacre'. 14 On 1 August 1935, the Victorian Council Against War and Fascism organised a mass rally in front of the Melbourne Trades Hall, in which the Italian group took part, and meetings were held on 18 August and 29 September 1935 in the hall of the Gruppo Italiano in Melbourne, in which Italian and Australian speakers debated the impending threat of war, and on 15 October 1935, at the Unity Hall. Yet another march was organised on 10 November from the Trades Hall to the Yarra Bank, while on the same day a rally was held at the Star Hall at Shepparton. The leaflets announcing these meetings denounced: 'Mussolini, arrogant Roman Napoleon ... who wants war in order to satisfy the lust for conquest of the Italian capitalist brigands and for the domestic needs of his nefarious decadent dictatorship'.15

In North Queensland, the Italians of the Herbert River issued at the same time a Manifesto Against War which condemned the Abyssinian conflict, while in February 1936, Matteo Cristofaro, concealing his identity under the cover name of Boschi di Branciaretti in fear of Fascist reprisals against his family in Australia or his relatives in Italy, went to Shepparton and spoke, together with another Italian and two Australian speakers, to a group of 150 people, fifty of whom were Italians, 16 The Idea Popolare, referring to rallies in which thousands of Australian workers as well as Italian anti-Fascists took part, reported that 'all over Australia huge demonstrations took place against the Fascist war in Abyssinia, the most important being the one held in November in Melbourne', where the presence of the Italian Group Against War and Fascism was: 'particularly noted for its flag and the two posters with the slogans "Down with Fascism, ruin to the Italian and Abyssinian people" and "Fascism does not believe in peace - Let war be its grave for the welfare of Humanity" '.17

During the Abyssinian conflict, the *Gruppo Italiano* also paraded through the streets of Melbourne exhibiting large posters mounted on trucks, illustrating the militarist and socially oppressive nature of Fascism. The posters were

painted by artists of the Australian Communist Party. The distribution of propaganda material by Cristofaro increased noticeably at this time: the recipients paid for it and Cristofaro sent the money to the National Committee of Diffusion and Defence of Proletarian Press of the Italian Communist Party which rewarded his efforts and appointed him to the position of *Udarnico*. 18 The increase in the party's propaganda activities in Australia has to be viewed in the light of Russia's decision to support the popular fronts, a move which improved the position of all Communist Parties directly engaged in the struggle against Fascism vis-à-vis other left-wing parties. The administration of Stato Operaio also thanked the Gruppo Italiano for sending to Paris names and addresses of Italians in Australia to whom sample copies of the magazine could be sent, although it was pointed out that 'only very few copies reach North Queensland, where there is a strong Italian community',19

In 1936 the Italian Communist Party began forwarding to members of the *Gruppo Italiano* lists of addresses of people living in Italy to whom they should mail, anonymously, propaganda material. The party hoped to avoid in this way the strict censorship affecting all mail and printed literature coming to Italy from countries such as France, Belgium, the United States or Argentina, which hosted large communities of exiles. About sixty to eighty names were supplied to members of the *Gruppo Italiano*²⁰ and Cristofaro sent propaganda material, mainly newsprint on rice paper, such as *L'Unità*, to twelve addresses in various parts of Italy.

Soon Cristofaro's postal propaganda was discovered by the Fascist authorities. Most probably one of his contacts informed on him. On 4 June 1936, he received an invitation to come to the Italian consulate in Melbourne. A few days later, when Cristofaro went there, he was questioned about his activities by the consul, Anzilotti, and was asked not to send propaganda literature to Italy. Cristofaro maintained a hostile attitude: having already obtained his Certificate of Naturalisation, no pressure could be exercised on him by the Italian diplomat. ²²

By 1936, although a firm contact had been established with the Italian Communist Party, it affected mainly the area of propaganda, and not of political strategy. A significant letter to Cristofaro from Ruggero Grieco, one of the leaders of the PCI, discloses the state of almost total political isolation in which the Italian Communist movement in Australia was working when he remarked that:

we know little of the political situation in Australia (only what is published by our international press, which is little); we cannot yet form our opinion about many things; character and social and political structure of Italian emigration; geographical distribution of Italian settlements; their relations with Italy; activities of the Fascists and the priests among the migrant masses; relations between migrants and Australian political movements; what sort of social life do Italians have. We know little even about our Australian Party . . . We do not know, therefore, if you have an organisation which is directing the work amongst Italians, where it is located, whether it is legal, what are its activities, whether it is issuing publications. 23

In effect the Italian Communist Party was completely in the dark on what was happening in this country. This very fact suggests that the party was of the opinion that whatever anti-Fascist activities were taking place in Australia, they were not significantly relevant to the local political situation nor to the international anti-Fascist movement. Grieco's letter clearly betrayed the impression that even the propaganda activities by Cristofaro and his *Gruppo Italiano* were deemed to have an amateurish character, and the Italian Communist cautioned Cristofaro to be prudent.²⁴ Australia's distance from the nervecentre of the Italian opposition abroad, France, and its relatively small political weight accounts for the tenuous links of the Italian Communists with the party and also for the individualism and spontaneity of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia.

The *Gruppo Italiano* during 1936 began corresponding with the Italian Socialists in exile to raise funds for the relief of imprisoned and deported Italian anti-Fascists. Subscription lists were sent all over Australia and money was collected for the liberation of the Anarchist Gino Lucetti, the Communist Umberto Terracini, the Socialist Alessandro Pertini, and for the Pesenti Committee. Sums of hundreds of pounds were also

raised for the Soccorso Rosso Italiano (Italian Red Relief) during the Spanish Civil War and in the following years. Public lectures were held in aid of Italian anti-Fascist prisoners, to which Australian political and trade union leaders were invited. T. M. Gleeson, President of the Australian Railways Union, chaired one of these meetings, convened in Melbourne by the Socialist Dr Schiassi on 29 March 1936. 26

As well as money, reports on the strength of the anti-Fascist movement all around Australia reached Cristofaro and his *Gruppo Italiano*. The Anarchist Francesco Carmagnola, then in Sydney, wrote that among Italians living in that city the anti-Fascist movement was non-existent,²⁷ while from North Queensland there was greater interest in the activities of the group.²⁸

During the Spanish Civil War the political activity of the Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra e il Fascismo reached its peak, since by 1936 most Australians and those Italians who. until then, had hoped for a compromise with the dictatorship, understood the overt imperialist nature of European Fascism. Pamphlets were printed in Italian to explain to the migrants how much the Fascist intevention damaged the real interests of the Italian people. Posters condemning the Italian collusion with Franco were paraded during May Day marches and on other occasions. Money was collected for the purchase of and medical supplies for clothes, food International Brigades. 29 The Gruppo Italiano participated in huge rallies at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne along with other organisations of an anti-Fascist People's Front character and was in close contact with many of them, such as the Victorian Council Against War and Fascism; the Spanish Relief Committee and the Council for Civil Liberties.

Members of the group were corresponding with many Communists who would soon leave France and go to Spain to achieve international fame: early in 1936 Ottavio Brida was still writing to Luigi Longo (Gallo), Di Vittorio, Mario Montagnana, Emilio Sereni and Teresa Noce (Estella). 30 Also, by mid-1937 Cristofaro began sending to the Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party in Paris a monthly report on the activities of the Italian Communists in Australia,

which was considered, at least in two instances, inadequate, mainly because Cristofaro was not experienced in writing such reports. 31

Yet by this time the party realised that its comrades in Australia might render an important service in gathering information on political and military events in Spain and Italy. Cristofaro was instructed to approach Italian sailors, especially if belonging to the Royal Italian Navy. Massimi remarked that:

the information which you can obtain from them is precious to our Party... The sailors can give information on the economic situation of their country, which can be useful to the Party as an indication of the real state of affairs of the Italian people.³²

He was supposed not only to collect intelligence and to distribute among migrants propaganda literature, but also to try to 'make them aware of the serious situation in which Fascism had driven and was still driving the Italian people with its policy of war'. ³³ The *Gruppo Italiano* did this whenever it was possible, and Cristofaro was even bold enough to go aboard the cruiser *Montecuccoli* when it arrived in Melbourne in February 1938 and concealed wherever he could copies of the newspaper *L'Unità*. ³⁴

By 1938 the members of the *Gruppo Italiano* who were also members of the Communist Party of Australia numbered about thirty-five.³⁵ Also, non-Communist members and sympathisers of the group had considerably increased. Many of them felt the need to have their own club or a place where they might meet socially and where politics could be discussed and activities carried out. At that time the Melbourne Fascists were collecting money for the construction of their club, which they intended to call the *Casa d'Italia*, in line with the instructions imparted by Consul-General Vita-Finzi in 1936. Unfortunately, they forgot to register the name *Casa d'Italia*. When Carlo Simeoni, a friend of Dr Schiassi, found out the Fascists' blunder, he quickly registered it on behalf of the Italian anti-Fascist Group.³⁶

The anti-Fascist Casa d'Italia was officially opened on 12 June 1938 in Carlton. The club, right from the beginning, had a

specific political and social program, which was outlined in its statute, drafted by Dr Schiassi, Luigi Stellato and by F. A. L. Callill, a lawyer sympathetic to the anti-Fascist cause.³⁷

Article 2 of the statute declared that the objectives of the club were:

- (a) to gather all progressive, liberal Italians migrated to Australia in a social, cultural and welfare club;
- (b) to promote friendship between the Italian and Australian people in the interest of peace and mutual welfare;
- (c) to set up a fund of 'Mutual Relief' in order to assist needy members and friends;
- (d) to set up a school of English for Italian migrants;
- (e) to set up a library for members' use;
- (f) to establish a theatrical company for the staging of Italian works;
- (g) to have a building in Melbourne for the use of the club's members.

Membership of the Casa d'Italia was denied by article 3 to people 'having political opinions incompatible with the principles of social progress', while article 35 even barred access to visitors 'who are considered by the Committee reprehensible or dangerous to the interests of the Casa d'Italia'. Both articles were obviously aimed at excluding from the club Fascists, Fascist sympathisers or agents provocateurs. 38 Dr Schiassi was appointed honorary president. Carlo Simeoni was its first president and two committees were formed, one administrative, the other political. In the political committee the Communist members of the Gruppo Italiano were strongly represented: they included Matteo Cristofaro, Guido Canteri, who also was the club's secretary, Ottavio Brida and Ruggero Vinco.39 Dr Schiassi, in his inaugural speech, declared that the new institution aimed at 'becoming essentially a centre of education, generating and stimulating culture, in order to give to the working class its leaders . . . '40

The Casa d'Italia was what the name indicated: a building, a meeting place, and the activities associated with the building: 41 social evenings and dance nights, sometimes attended by over 600 people, lectures and political rallies

which were addressed, as well as by the ubiquitous Dr Schiassi, by several Australian speakers, among whom were Guido Baracchi, an outstanding Australian working-class leader and one of the founders of the Australian Communist Party; ⁴² Judge Foster; Ralph Gibson, then Victorian Secretary of the Communist Party; A. A. Calwell; E. J. Holloway, Labor MHR; and Senator Cameron.

Members of the *Casa d'Italia* also staged and performed in theatrical works, such as Goldoni's comedies and other plays. 43 One of the memorable events in the club's history was the reception given to Ernesto Baratto, a Queensland anti-Fascist who fought in the International Brigades. Upon his return from Spain he was brought to the *Casa d'Italia* and welcomed by a crowd of 600 cheering people. 44

The Italian Communist Party sent from France to the Casa d'Italia approximately 200 books as well as Communist newspapers for its library, 45 and in 1939 intensified its drive to increase the circulation of Communist and anti-Fascist literature among the non-Communist members of the club. 46

The Casa d'Italia became an important anti-Fascist centre in the last years before the War,⁴⁷ and there is no available evidence to show that its impact on anti-Fascist Italians was ever lessened, not even at the time of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In a way, it resumed the activities which the Matteotti club had so effectively promoted in the late 1920s, with the important difference that in the Casa d'Italia the Gruppo Italiano became the political guardian of its activities, and its Communist members were the ones who determined the political line followed by the Gruppo Italiano.

Membership of the Casa d'Italia remained restricted to its thirty-eight foundation members: it was feared that agents provocateurs or spies would otherwise infiltrate the organisation and undermine it. 48 Indeed, not only in the Casa d'Italia but also among the members of the Gruppo Italiano mutual distrust was frequent: Cristofaro, a very suspicious character, 49 had doubts about the political reliability of many members of the group and even about the president of the Casa d'Italia, Simeoni. He suspected them of collusion with the Commonwealth Investigation Branch. These fears were not altogether groundless: the branch was keeping a close watch

on all Communist and left-wing organisations and one of its informers was very friendly with Simeoni and several times approached Cristofaro. ⁵⁰ After September 1939 the *Casa d'Italia* was visited three or four times by the CIB and Cristofaro was called to the CIB and questioned. ⁵¹

The allegations against Simeoni's connections with the CIB cost him the presidency of the *Casa d'Italia*: at a rowdy meeting in 1940, Simeoni was compelled to relinquish the post and he was replaced by Boris Franceschini, an Anarchist with Communist sympathies.⁵²

Italy's entry into the war marked the end of the *Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra e il Fascimo* and of the *Casa d'Italia*. Only two dozen people took part in the last meeting of the club, the majority of anti-Fascists being as scared and uncertain about their future as the Fascists. The *Casa d'Italia* was closed by the police on 7 September 1940.

Matteo Cristofaro, although the Communist Party of Australia had been declared an illegal organisation by the Menzies government on 15 June 1940, still persisted in his struggle against Fascism. By 1941 he had already formed the Italiano (Italian Anti-Fascist Antifascista Movimento Movement) which carried on with the activities that had distinguished the Gruppo Italiano. Pamphlets were printed and distributed in Victoria and New South Wales. Francesco Carmagnola wrote to Cristofaro that his leaflets 'got on the nerves of the local Italian greengrocers at the markets'.54 Yet the response of the Italians who had not been interned was very poor, and in 1941 the movement relied exclusively on the support of a hard core of militants, a few dozen, who had been faithful to the cause of anti-Fascism since the times of the Matteotti Club.55

After Hitler's aggression against the Soviet Union, the Italian anti-Fascist movement gained in popularity and became instrumental in the revival of anti-Fascism among Italians, which resulted in the foundation of the *Italia Libera* Movement in 1943.

For Italian Communists in Australia the 1930s were years of struggle. Deeply affected by the social dislocation caused by the Depression, confronted with the increasing successes of Fascism in international affairs, hardly tolerated by the Australian government, lacking an intellectual élite which could articulate their policies and propaganda and could organise them on a wider scale, the Italian Communists were the only ones who, between 1932 and 1940, clearly saw their moral and political duty to pick up the torch of the anti-Fascist struggle and they carried it through the darkest years of the history of the Italian Resistance against Fascism.

Such men as Matteo Cristofaro, Paolo De Angelis, Ottavio Brida, Ruggero Vinco, Guido Canteri, Giovanni Corso, Angelo Coladetti, Boris Franceschini, Luigi Stellato, Giuseppe Zammarchi, although the nucleus of a small minority among the Italian community in Australia, never despaired of their cause. Hardly literate (Cristofaro's schooling ended at the fourth primary), they achieved political self-education and carried out their activities with faith and idealism.

At times they met incomprehension and hostility even among Australian Communists. Cristofaro, before the Spanish Civil War, was approached by an Australian party member and told to disband the *Gruppo Italiano*, which he refused to do. Obviously, the existence and the success of a 'dago' organisation associated with the party, yet autonomous, was objected to by some Australian Communists. ⁵⁶ During these years bias against aliens trying to express their political and cultural needs through their own organisations was not uniquely a bourgeois peculiarity.

In the final assessment, the *Gruppo Italiano contro la Guerra e il Fascismo*, notwithstanding the dedication of its members, did not achieve spectacular results during the 1930s. The group's strength was limited to Melbourne and a few Victorian country towns, and although propaganda literature was sent to other states, no other Australian centre possessed a political group which could match the activities of the *Gruppo Italiano*.

Its membership remained very limited, and even the Communists (the most active and therefore the most influential anti-Fascists) failed to attract new recruits. Although donating money to the cause of anti-Fascism, many young people refused to join such a militant organisation as the *Gruppo Italiano* or to become members of the Communist Party of Australia.⁵⁷

Matteo Cristofaro was an accomplished working-class leader, and carried out remarkable propaganda work, but did not succeed in creating an anti-Fascist mass movement. Many people, commented Ralph Gibson, 'fell out because they were not ready to follow him through fire and water'.58

In the late 1930s the rising fortunes of Fascism dazzled Italians of all political opinions and discouraged those leaning towards the anti-Fascist cause to express in public their support for it. In addition the strong anti-Communist feelings of the Australian government acted on Italian Communist sympathisers as a deterrent equivalent to the one exercised on Italian sympathisers of Fascism by Australia's hostility towards Mussolini's government.

Thus, before World War II Communism had a limited influence on the political activities of the Italian community. and even its contribution to the anti-Fascist movement in Australia, although of great historical and ideological importance was, in terms of organisation, negligible, because it fell short of its declared aims to organise the Italian migrants into a militant mass party ready to fight Fascism and representative of the class consciousness of Italian workers in Australia.

Notes

1 AA, CRS A989, item 455/7/2, Vaccari to Prime Minister of Italy,

7 Aug. 1944.

2 The Fascist authorities in Australia always tried to inculcate upon the minds of their countrymen the policy of not engaging themselves in politics, but of blindly following the dictates of those who knew better. Undoubtedly they achieved remarkable results, and Italians were not conscious practitioners of the democratic interplay, but succumbed to the persuasiveness of Fascist propaganda. Apart from the anti-Fascists and the core of militant Fascists, the greatest majority were unconscious crypto-Fascists. The best proof which invalidates the interpretation put forward by Vaccari is given by Vaccari himself: in 1940 he stated that 'at least nine out of ten of our conationals are not enrolled in Fascism, but they are not against it' (AA, CRS A373, item 6230, Vaccari to Albanese, 20 Feb. 1940).

3 Matteo Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973. These were for him times of extreme hardship, being often compelled to work, unpaid, just for one hot meal a day, and sleeping in the open on

- sugar bags filled with straw. At one stage Cristofaro fell seriously ill by feeding himself only on bread and tea.
- 4 He read Il Martello and L'Adunata dei Refrattari (Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973).
- 5 On J. W. Fleming, see Bertha Walker, Solidarity Forever, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 61-3.
- 6 Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.
- 7 Cristofaro, interview 29 May 1973.
- 8 See Gibson, My Years in the Communist Party, pp. 40-1. Ralph Gibson was born in London in 1906. He came to Australia in 1912, and in the 1920s graduated in history and political science at the University of Melbourne. Both his father and brother became Professors of Philosophy at the same university. He obtained his M.A. degree in economics at Manchester University, England, in 1930. He joined the Australian Communist Party in 1932 and was elected to the Victorian State Committee of the party in 1933, and soon after this to the Central Committee. He spoke Italian.
- 9 Paolo De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973; Ottavio Brida, interview, 13 March 1974.
- 10 Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973: ibid., 14 March 1974; Ralph Gibson, interview, 28 May 1973.
- 11 Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973.
- 12 Cristofaro Papers, Cristofaro to Mario Montagnana, 26 June 1943. The papers are held by the author. Also, ibid., Grieco to Cristofaro, 9 June 1936.
- 13 Cristofaro to author, letter, 6 April, 1974.
- 14 Age, 2 July 1935. His threat was countered with a statement by the presidents of the Melbourne Fascio, the Italian Returned Soldier's Association of Melbourne, the Dante Alighieri Society, the Club Cavour, the SMS Isole Eolie and the Italian Chamber of Commerce, Victorian Branch, in which they stated 'on behalf of their Italian members, whose aggregate number represents the majority of the Italian residents in Victoria, that they have the fullest confidence in their Government and in its ability to uphold the honour and rights of Italy' (Sun, 4 July 1935). Vanzini challenged their claim of representation, but the presidents confirmed it. The associate editor of Il Giornale Italiano, Pino Boggio, condemned the statements of the Italian Group Against War, adding that the group represented 'only a negligible section of the Italian community in Melbourne', and that its statements were met not only 'with the contempt of the Italian community. but also of any fair-minded Australian, who is ever mindful of his duty towards his own country' (Sun, 21 Aug. 1935).
- 15 Bando ad ogni esitazione: tutti al comizio, leaflet held by the author.
- 16 Idea Popolare, Feb. 1936.
- 17 Ibid.

- 18 Cristofare Papers, 1936 file. Udarnico is derived from a Russian word for worker.
- 19 Stato Operaio, Supplement, Aug. 1936, No. 8.

Brida, interview. 20

Cristofaro Papers, Invitation No. 1778 dated 4 June 1936 (ibid.). 21

Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973. 22

- 23 Cristofaro Papers, Grieco to Cristofaro, 9 June 1936.
- 24 Ibid. Grieco pointed out that 'propaganda literature cannot be sold as you are selling fruit: everybody eats fruit: instead our literature is welcome only by people who begin, at least, to take an interest in the struggle of liberation of the working class . . . You must be careful in writing to your relatives in Italy; be cunning; do not compromise those poor people with hasty enterprises. They, for sure, are glad to receive the literature which you are sending: but you must not take advantage of their good faith'.

25 Cristofaro, interview 18 Dec. 1973; Cristofaro Papers, 1936 file;

Brida, interview.

Cristofaro Papers, Gleeson to Schiassi, 17 March 1936. The 26 meeting was also addressed by Maurice Blackburn, Labor MHR and close friend of Dr Schiassi. Dr Schiassi spoke on 'Carducci as a man, politician, thinker, critic and poet', Percy Laidler, one of the founders of the Victorian Branch of the Communist Party, also spoke.

Ibid., Carmagnola to Cristofaro, 14 Feb. 1936. 27

28 Ibid., Noselli to Cristofaro, 1 March 1936, From Mareeba, Old, ten Italians asked for more literature and offered their solidarity in the struggle against Fascism and 'the maniac from Predappio'.

29 De Angelis, interview, 16 Nov. 1973.

Brida, interview. 30

- 31 Cesare Massimi (Silverio), rather bewildered, wrote to Cristofaro that 'we have received your monthly report. We are surprised, since it is the second one which you are sending to us blank, without even a line telling us anything, at least whether you have received our letter of the 22/6/37, or how is your work going, if you need any other addresses to which to mail propaganda literature' (Cristofaro Papers, 'Silverio' to 'Branciaretti', 23 Sept. 1937).
- Ibid. 32
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Cristofaro, interview, 18 Dec. 1973.

Ibid., 18 May 1973. 35

36 De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973; Luigi Stellato, interview, 13 March 1974. Although the credit for the opening of the Casa d'Italia must go to non-Communists, in particular to Carlo Simeoni and Luigi Stellato, it must be noted that already in 1936 Matteo Cristofaro suggested to Grieco the idea of creating clubs for Italian workers, and Grieco encouraged the scheme, advising him to set them up on the pattern of the Italian Brotherhoods in France (Cristofaro Papers, Grieco to Cristofaro, 9 June 1936).

37 Stellato, interview.

38 Stellato Papers, 1938 file. Statute of the club Casa d'Italia. The papers are held by the author.

39 De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.

40 From the pamphlet issued on the occasion of the opening of the Casa d'Italia.

41 Gibson, interview.

42 On him, see Walker, Solidarity, pp. 142-9 and 230-3.

43 De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973; Brida, interview; Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.

44 Brida, interview; De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.

- 45 Brida, interview; Cristofaro Papers, Editions de Culture Sociale to 'Branciaretti', 13 Feb. 1939.
- 46 Cristofaro Papers, Strada to Cristofaro, 5 Aug. 1939.

47 Gibson, interview.

48 De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.

49 Cristofaro, interview, 14 March 1974; Gibson, interview.

50 Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973. On the personality and activities of O'Cassidy see Walker, *Solidarity*, pp. 191-3 and Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 19-20.

51 Cristofaro, interview, 14 March 1974.

52 Ibid., 17 Dec. 1973; also, Boris Franceschini, interview, 18 Dec. 1973.

53 Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973.

54 Cristofaro Papers, Carmagnola to Cristofaro, 13 Nov. 1941.

- 55 Carmagnola in 1941 commented that 'we must admit that it is very difficult now to make propaganda, because the greatest majority of our nationals, owing to the war, are with Mussolini's Italy. The hatred caused by wars, and by this one in particular, attracts to their country, which is in war against England, all people who have never been militant and who feel and understand nothing and who have no interest in social problems' (ibid.).
- 56 When the group wanted to purchase a property in Queensberry Street with the idea of opening a club, and Cristofaro approached the party for financial support, he was told that the scheme did not meet with the approval of the party since a separate Italian organisation was not necessary; yet soon after and to Cristofaro's amazement the property was purchased by the Communist Party of Australia (Cristofaro, interview, 14 March 1974).
- 57 Cristofaro, interview, 17 Dec. 1973.
- 58 Gibson, interview.

7Fascist Propaganda in Australia, 1922-1940

Shortly, an organisation will arise here which will be the first in Italy. Everything will pass through my hands, we will speak to the whole world. We will tell all other countries about Italy and her great men. We will use radio, theatre, and the movies. And, naturally, we will use the press. But above all we will use men.

(Galeazzo Ciano, 1935 speech)

In contrast with the wealth of material and literature on Nazi propaganda, very little has been written on the extent and the aims of political propaganda spread by the Italian Fascist regime amongst its citizens abroad.

The importance of influencing the opinions and behaviour of Italians abroad in favour of the new political ideals had been realised by Mussolini and his colleagues even before coming to power. By 1919 Mussolini was proclaiming from the columns of the *Popolo d'Italia* that the 'Italy of tomorrow' would follow a policy of 'peaceful economic and spiritual' expansionism in the world. Soon after the seizure of power, when the first branches of the Fascist Party were formed by Italians abroad, their scope was described as being that of 'enlisting' all Italians and of 'informing' them of the Fascist government's

interpretation of current political events.2 To this effect the Ufficio Stampa (Press Bureau) of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs was reorganised and given a new head. Amedeo Giannini, who was instructed to increase his efforts in order to 'defend more effectively the interests of Italians abroad'.3 Notwithstanding Mussolini's repeated assertions during the 1920s that Fascism could not be 'exported' to other countries, as early as 1923 the importance of controlling the attitudes and actions of Italians abroad was openly admitted by Fascist officials. In October of that year, Giovanni Marinelli, who was, together with Cesare Rossi and Michele Bianchi, a member of the central leadership of the Fasci, suggested to Mussolini that the Secretary of the Office of Fascist Branches Abroad should be admitted to the General Secretariat of the PNF.4 At the same time, one of the most influential men close to the Duce, Cornelio Di Marzio, who was to become from March 1927 to January 1928 General Secretary of the Italian Fasci Abroad, in his book Fascism Abroad, stressed the point that Fascism was a flexible doctrine and that 'its magnificent nature allows it to be transplanted in every country and to be effective in every climate'.5

Italians abroad must be conditioned to 'second and to obey' Fascism: 'they cannot and must not have opinions differing from the ones put forward by the national Government: they must not have opposite ideas; if they do not criticise they will have nothing to oppose'.6

Yet in spite of the rash statements by its leaders, Fascist propaganda abroad, and in Australia in particular, started on a low key. There is no evidence to suggest that in the 1920s the aspiration of controlling the political opinions of Italians in Australia materialised in a program, nor that all available propaganda channels were exploited in a systematic way. This failure could be attributed to the fact that the mass media had not yet reached a very advanced technological development. Radio and cinema had limited audiences, and no newspaper had a circulation wide enough to reach all sections of the population. Moreover, owing to its rapid success, Fascism lacked cadres experienced in the work of grass-root propaganda.⁷

From 1922 to the end of 1927 Fascist propaganda in Australia was carried out mainly by the *Italo-Australian* which, since its first issue, declared its unconditional support for the cause of Fascism. From its pages this newspaper went on for years praising the policies of the new Italian government and defending them against its opponents; its main goal was to explain to the Italian community what Fascism was and to make it acceptable to the widest public. Articles such as that on 'What is Fascism', stating that 'Mussolini... wants a strong Italy, capable of protecting her sons both at home and abroad', and those written by Antonio Baccarini 'On the recent political events in Italy', figured prominently in the pages of the Italian weekly.

At the same time, political statements made by the leaders of the Italian community were given wide coverage. When Tommaso Fiaschi, president of the *Associazione Italiana*, declared at a banquet that 'God has given us Benito Mussolini', the *Italo-Australian* reported that his words had been applauded enthusiastically by all present.¹⁰

Statements by Australians sympathetic to Fascism were also used for propaganda purposes. H. S. W. Lawson, Premier of Victoria, visited Italy in 1923 and met Mussolini. Upon his return, he went out of his way to praise Fascism and its leader 'the man whom Providence wanted to lead Italy'.¹¹

Similar declarations by Sir George Fuller, Premier of New South Wales, expressing unreserved admiration of 'the man ... who saved Italy ... from Bolshevism', 12 were widely circulated amongst the Italian community in Australia.

Such unsolicited statements of support for Fascism were very important to the Fascist leaders in Australia: they served the purpose of demonstrating to all Italians that a wide spectrum of responsible foreign public opinion was in agreement with the Italian government's policies, and that only 'anti-national' elements could oppose a cause that was internationally recognised as promoting the welfare of Italy. The Italo-Australian faithfully translated all foreign articles praising Fascism and reprinted them in its pages; it also reprinted news and articles from the Popolo d'Italia and other Fascist newspapers which reached Sydney.

In 1926 propaganda activities were stepped up disguised as lectures. The contribution of the Sydney Vice-Consul Mario Carosi was instrumental in their success. ¹³ At the same time foreign lecturers praised Fascism to Italian and Australian audiences. Worth mentioning again is the cycle of lectures given in 1927 by Brigadier-General Charles Rudkin. His contribution to the cause of Fascism in Australia was considered so valuable by the Fascists that the Dante Alighieri Society presented him with a book containing the biographies of 3,000 squadrists killed in the Fascist cause during the years 1919-22. ¹⁴

The Fascist propaganda effort in Australia was made easier during these years by the attitude of the Catholic Church: many Italians were impressed by the unreserved praise showered upon Mussolini and Fascism by the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig.

On the whole, the general impression derived from the activities of Italian Fascists in the propaganda field in Australia between 1922 and 1927 is one of ad hoc initiatives. unrelated to each other. They lacked vision and long range planning. The aims of Fascist propaganda during these years were not clearly stated, but seemed to be oriented towards the conversion of all Italians in Australia by sheer appeal to their patriotic feelings. The equation 'Fascism is Italy' was often brought to the attention of the recipients of Fascist propaganda. Yet by the end of 1927 it seemed obvious that such methods were just not enough. The international opposition to Fascism was becoming increasingly vocal, and a revision of Fascist propaganda methods was overdue. Such need was clearly expressed by the General Secretary of the Italian Fasci Abroad, Cornelio Di Marzio, at the Fascist Grand Council meeting of 7 November 1927. In his report, Di Marzio repeatedly mentioned the absence of organisation and lack of direction, and asked for a:

co-ordination of aims and resources since we are still too many to deal with our activities abroad. Lately even the Party has extended some of its activities abroad. We must be allowed to penetrate every organisation which deals with our activities abroad: we must assume all initiatives and responsibilities.¹⁵

The need to centralise the control of all activities, to take the initiative by circulating more propaganda material abroad and not just to respond to requests for propaganda, was sponsored by Giuseppe Bottai in his report to the Fascist Grand Council of 17 September 1928, where he complained that 'on request, we prepare data and information; but it is not enough'.¹⁶

From 1928 to 1931, the year in which the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs opened a Servizio per la Propaganda (Propaganda Bureau) aiming at centralising in the hands of this body the responsibility for the control of all services operating abroad, it is possible to detect an increasing consciousness by Fascist officials in Italy and abroad of the importance of propaganda. Balbino Giuliano, Minister for National Education, in a speech in October 1929 at the thirty-fourth Congress of the Dante Alighieri Society, openly admitted how important to the regime were the cultural and propaganda activities carried out by Italian associations, individuals and foreign sympathisers: he declared: 'Today all nations are committed to a struggle that is involving all processes of learning and culture and that must decide on the extent of their spiritual spheres of influence in the new order'.¹⁷

In Australia this period witnessed an increasing sophistication in the propaganda techniques employed by the representatives of the Italian government. While the old methods of using the press for circulating all news favourable to the regime, the community meetings for whipping up Italian nationalism, the lectures for promoting - under cultural pretexts - Fascist principles, received great impetus, new weapons were added to the Fascist propaganda arsenal. The newly-formed party branches contributed to meetings and celebrations with the charisma of their black shirts, badges, flags, husky cries of A Noi (To Us), songs and all the other trappings of Fascist choreography. All this left a definite imprint on the minds of simple Italians, convinced by the martial and disciplined show of strength that the new regime was really ready to show its teeth in defence of their rights if the need should arise. During 1928 other newspapers appeared, flanking with their pro-Fascist propaganda the Italo-Australian, the Italian Bulletin of Australia, and the Sydney Fascist Branch organ, Il Littorio, which started publishing in September 1927. They were the already mentioned L'eco d'Italia, promoted by the Italian Consul Francesco Pascale, and the Corriere degli Italiani in Australia, sponsored by the Italian consul-general.

During the same year a new medium was used for the first time in Australia for the diffusion of Fascist propaganda: the cinema. The regime had realised the importance of this new channel of mass communications in 1925, when Mussolini ordered his ministers to grant official recognition to the *Istituto LUCE* (National Institute for Educational Filmmaking) and to use its services for propaganda purposes. Is It was in Sydney in April 1928 that the first propaganda film, *Militia*, was screened. In February of the following year another film, *Mussolini Speaks*, was shown at the Auditorium in Melbourne. Yet these were only timid attempts in the use of this new instrument and the cinema would be widely and successfully used only in the 1930s.

It is the year 1931 that really marks the watershed of Fascist propaganda abroad, when Mussolini publicly repudiated his previous assertion that Fascism was not an article for export and proclaimed instead that: 'Fascism as an idea, a doctrine, a realisation, is universal; it is Italian in its particular institutions, but universal in its spirit, nor could it be otherwise . . . Fascism today is relevant to the universal needs'. At the same time a prominent journalist, an intimate friend of Mussolini since the days of Via Paolo del Cannobio who would be close to the Duce in the most important moments of his life, at Munich and in Milan in April 1945, Asvero Gravelli, published a book, Verso l'Internazionale Fascista, in which he expanded on Mussolini's statement and identified the aims of Italian Fascist propaganda abroad as follows:

We shall establish and consolidate an alliance with all Fascist groups or groups of similar tendency or domestic groups that have the same spiritual, political and economic needs. We shall establish close contacts with all groups scattered around the world, in order to sow and spread the Fascist ideals. We shall carry out an incessant propaganda activity, reaching every intellectual, wherever he might be . . . We shall establish a permanent liaison with the European and world élites. 22

By 1931 the aims of Fascist propaganda became more articulate and more intelligently defined. By and large the original need to maintain a certain cultural pressure on the masses was considered still as being of paramount importance; yet for the first time Rome advocated the co-operation of foreign political groups and of individuals who could be instrumental in the diffusion of Fascist ideals and in the creation of a Fascist International. Consequently, the extension of propaganda aims made necessary a revision of the currently available techniques. For the first time propaganda in favour of the regime by overseas sympathisers was not simply welcome but was solicited by the Italian regime.

This policy of direct commitment by the Italian government to the diffusion of Fascism in foreign countries became manifest also in Australia. Here too the Italian authorities aimed at imposing upon their countrymen their total political and educational control, from the cradle to the grave. Thus propaganda began in the school, since the education of youth was of paramount concern to the regime. When in 1933 the Fascist branches in Australia began to run classes in Italian language and culture, their teachers, recruited exclusively among members of the Fascist Party, used textbooks supplied by the Direzione delle Scuole all'Estero. The books contained obvious propaganda aimed at winning the allegiance of the voung minds: the children were taught that Fascism commanded from other nations respect and fear for Italy and that they 'must feel the pride of being the heirs of Rome, the sons of Rome', because 'Rome's destiny is one of greatness and power'.23 Schools were opened in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Wonthaggi, Werribee. Children were drafted in the Balilla, the Fascist youth organisation, and attended classes in Fascist uniform. At times they took part in political rallies: in Adelaide, on the occasion of the official termination of the Italo-Abyssinian war, between thirty to forty children paraded as members of the Balilla and the viceconsul, Amerio, attended in Fascist uniform and addressed the children. In the 1930s the Italian government opened summer camps in Italy for boys and girls living abroad, for the purpose of preventing Italian children resident or born abroad from being lost to Italy. In Australia there was only one attempt to send children to these camps: in 1936 Fascists of Innisfail and Ingham started to raise funds to send Australian-born Italian youths to Italy for Easter 1937.²⁴

Fascism in Australia endeavoured to expand its educational institutions whenever and wherever opportunities arose. Even on the eye of the outbreak of hostilities in 1940 the Fascist authorities continued opening new schools: the vice-consul in Adelaide, Felice Rando, inaugurated the last one in Adelaide in March 1940. The fact that these schools were not just fostering among Italian children the knowledge of the cultural heritage of their Fatherland but were hotbeds of Fascist indoctrination was explicitly admitted by the Italian government, when in 1939 the Carta della Scuola (Education Charter) codified the intimate connection between the Fascist Party and the school in all aspects of education, training and social assistance.²⁵ The Fascist bias of the Italian schools was by the Australian quickly detected authorities who nevertheless did nothing to discourage or to stop their continuation.26

In 1931 the Italian government began distributing in Australia pamphlets illustrating the achievements and the policies of the regime to the educated Italian élite and to Australian sympathisers. The leader of the New Guard, Eric Campbell, was given Fascist literature by Antonio Baccarini, President of the Dante Alighieri Society, one of the many organisations entrusted with the distribution of such material.²⁷ Yet the supply of literature was irregular, insufficient and took too long to reach its destination. All Italian legations were in the difficult situation of having to ask for propaganda material and, when it was sent only in limited quantities, it arrived too late to make an impact on its readers.²⁸ Consul-General Agostino Ferrante complained to Rome that he did not receive until December 1934 five copies of a pamphlet that he had requested in July.²⁹

It was only with the outbreak of the war in Abyssinia that the Italian government stepped up the distribution of pamphlets and other material in large quantities. In October 1935 the *Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda* reported that during that month the distribution in Oceania of propaganda material had reached a record: 2,130 pamphlets, eighty-eight photographs and nine graphs.³⁰

The increase in the volume of propaganda received in Australia at this time reflected the upgrading of the propaganda machine carried out by Mussolini: in September 1934 the *Ufficio Stampa* was abolished and replaced by an Undersecretariat for Press and Propaganda which was raised in June 1935 to the status of Ministry for Press and Propaganda. In May 1937 the name of this institution was changed to Ministry for Popular Culture. In order to streamline its activities, the *Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda* was divided into four sections: the *Ufficio II* was in charge of anti-Communist propaganda; the *Ufficio III* controlled radio broadcasts; the *Ufficio IV* organised all artistic and cinematic propaganda.³¹

In April 1936 the *Direzione Generale* began to send periodically pamphlets and books to thirty-two Australian citizens. They had been chosen upon recommendation of the Italian consuls in Australia and were prominent representatives of the Australian Establishment. The literature was sent by the *Direzione Generale* to the consuls in Sydney and Melbourne, who were instructed to mail it anonymously, 'without indicating the sender's origin'.³² The Sydney consulate-general was given the task of distributing the material to eighteen addresses, while the Melbourne consulate did the same with the other fourteen.³³

By 1937 Rome responded quickly to requests for material, but as a rule, before sending anything, information was requested from the local consuls on the applicants' political ideas. All people approaching the Italian authorities with requests for literature on the country's political institutions were screened and registered in Rome. In February 1937 the files on foreign sympathisers or students of Fascism all over the world included 7,125 names.³⁴ In October 1935 alone, they were sent a total of 9,051 pamphlets.³⁵ The consuls were also requested:

in order to enrich the Personal File of the *Direzione Generale*, to send information on the name, the address, the political and professional activities and their feelings

for Fascist Italy, of the people to whom pamphlets will be delivered.³⁶

The *Ufficio I*, by means of the services of the consuls, endeavoured to have photographs of Italian political events printed in Australian newspapers, but met with considerable difficulties. In November 1936 the Melbourne consul, Enrico Anzilotti, protested to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda that:

having the possibility to obtain publication in Australian magazines and newspapers of photographs of Italian current events ... they are often received when the events are already forgotten and therefore are not any longer interesting enough to justify their publication.³⁷

During the Abyssinian conflict the Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda began to send to the Italian consuls in Australia articles written by journalists and specialists in its employment, outlining the Italian position in the conflict, or praising the achievements of the regime. The consuls tried to have them printed by the Australian press. The Italian newspapers, and in the first place the Giornale Italiano which, according to Anzilotti, carried out 'useful propaganda work',38 regularly printed such articles without mentioning their origin. The publication of the same articles by the Australian press was more difficult, owing to its hostile attitude to Fascism, but the consuls usually overcame the problem by asking local Italians to send the articles in their name, thus disguising their real origin. 39 The Direzione Generale reported in August 1940 that Australia's demand for articles in the 1930s had been one of the highest in the world. 40

The Ministry for Press and Propaganda did not stop at sending articles and pamphlets; it also engaged the services of cultured Italians in Australia and gave them all possible assistance in order to help in their efforts in favour of Fascism. Dr Antonio Baccarini printed in 1936 a booklet entitled What For? outlining the point of view of a naturalised Australian on the Italo-Abyssinian dispute and praising the regime's determination to conquer its 'place in the sun', its 'civilising mission' in Abyssinia that was at the same time 'a revolution against imperialism and international capitalism'.⁴¹

This publication attracted the attention of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, which sent a copy to London for purposes of comparison with other Fascist literature distributed in the United Kingdom by the Italian Embassy and the consulates. The Investigation Branch, although unable to establish whether Baccarini had been assisted by the Italian diplomatic representatives in writing his book, strongly suspected the connivance of the Fascist consuls in his propaganda effort.⁴²

Pamphlets distributed in Melbourne and Sydney caused growing concern to the Commonwealth authorities. When in September 1935 3,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled Il punto di vista Italiano nella Questione Abissina (The Abyssinian question from the Italian standpoint) and prepared by G. Vaccari, a wealthy businessman of Melbourne, were published, the federal government objected to its biased propaganda content and sought to prevent its distribution unless the Italian consul-general would agree to modify the parts which the Minister for External Affairs, Sir G. F. Pearce, described: 'as provocative and liable to lead to reprisals from those holding different views and therefore calculated to bring about events, which might impair good international relations'.43 Notwithstanding that amendments to the original text were made by the Melbourne consul, Anzilotti, the content of the pamphlet was still objectionable to Pearce, who reiterated that 'nothing is further from the truth, and nothing is more calculated to do harm at the present time than a continuation of such propaganda'.44 The Italian consulates were not deterred by the minister's representations: on the contrary, the pamphlet was reprinted in its original form in November 1935 under the signature of Nino Gremmo⁴⁵ and distributed to all Italians calling at the Sydney and Melbourne consulates. 46 The transmission of pamphlets continued unabated, even up to Italy's entry into World War II; between 10 January and 10 June 1940 the Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda despatched to this country 505 publications. 47

Articles and pamphlets in support of the Italian case on the Abyssinian question were also written by Australian sympathisers with Fascism. Dr H. M. Moran upon his return from Italy and from his second audience with Mussolini in

1935 wrote his Letters from Rome which were printed in booklet form and given wide distribution. D. G. M. Jackson, a Catholic journalist, with his articles in favour of Fascism in the Tribune and the Advocate, earned the admiration of the Melbourne consul, Arrighi, who proposed him to the Italian government for a prize in token of appreciation for his attachment to the Fascist cause.⁴⁸

In the 1930s the Italian consuls in Australia tried to promote Fascism by launching several initiatives that on the surface did not seem to have a propaganda content but that well fitted the overall pattern of publicising the regime's policies abroad. When in 1936 the Australian Broadcasting Commission asked the Italian government for the texts of modern Italian plays with the aim of broadcasting them to the Australian public, the consul-general, Paolo Vita-Finzi, wrote to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda recommending the acceptance of this request, 'because it would be a useful channel of propaganda to our favour'. 49 The Italian participation in the Sydney Art Exhibition that opened on 1 July 1936, although officially sponsored by the *Biennale* Exhibition of Venice, was in fact financed by the Ministry for Press and Propaganda, and the consul-general reported to Rome on the reactions of the Australian public.50

Other initiatives included gifts of propaganda books to the University of Western Australia, to be distributed to the students;51 of slides of Fascist Italy to the South Australian government⁵² and of political books to several individuals and associations requesting them for educational or research purposes, as was the case with a Victorian schoolteacher, who asked Rome for 'any available information and aids . . . for the education of children up to about seventeen years of age' and received a copy of Volpe's History of the Fascist Movement. Mussolini's The Doctrine of Fascism and Four Speeches on the Corporate State, and scores of other propaganda pamphlets;53 or with Miss M. Hentze of the History Department of the University of Sydney who, upon her request, received propaganda material only after the Ministry for Popular Culture asked and obtained from the consulate-general 'about this person every possible information that would enable us to judge about her usefulness to the aims of our propaganda'.54

Another aspect of propaganda was the assistance given by the Italian government and by its representatives in Australia to leading Australian politicians, businessmen, journalists, who visited Italy for professional reasons or for the purpose of fostering their knowledge of Fascist Italy. When two members of the federal parliament visited Italy in 1935, they expressed the wish to see the achievements of the regime. Upon instructions of Ciano, then Under-Secretary for Press and Propaganda, they were shown Littoria and Saubadia as guests of the Ministry for the Interior. 55 Similarly, E. F. Borrie, Chief Engineer of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, had his study tour arranged by the Ministry for Press and Propaganda on recommendation of Consul Anzilotti, who supported it by stressing: 'the importance of the Board and the opportunity, for our propaganda aims, to spread in this country, so ignorant about our Fatherland, a greater knowledge of what has been and is being achieved by the Regime'.56 Journalists travelling to Italy to research various aspects of contemporary Italian society were also well taken care of. The Melbourne consul, Arrighi, in 1937 introduced D. P. McGuire, a Catholic journalist, to Andrea Gheisser Celesia, Director-General of Propaganda, asking him to 'help and orient in his work' in Italy this 'friend of Italy'.57

Yet the highest sign of the regime's appreciation for the propaganda work carried out by foreigners was to grant them an audience with Mussolini. This official recognition of their valuable contribution to the cause of Fascism was not only a reward, but also stimulated the people on which it was bestowed to further pronouncements in favour of this ideology. Archbishop Duhig, we have seen, received this honour in the mid-1920s; Eric Campbell, leader of the New Guard movement, went to Rome in 1933 with a letter of introduction from Sir Oswald Mosley, but the Duce was away and instead he was received by the Secretary of the Fascist Party, Starace.⁵⁸. Dr H. M. Moran, whose sympathies for Fascism were well known, saw Mussolini in 1932 and again in 1935⁵⁹ while E. G. Waterhouse, Professor of German literature at the University of Sydney and councillor of the Sydney branch of the Dante Alighieri Society, was admitted to the Duce's presence in 1934. The Ufficio Stampa recommended the granting of an interview because Professor Waterhouse was:

a very influential person and an admirer of the Duce. He still expresses some reservation on Fascism: the granting of an audience by the head of Government would suffice, according to the President of the Dante, to dispel any remaining prejudice and to stimulate him to promote our language and culture in Australia. 60

During the 1930s two other methods of mass media communication were widely used for propaganda purposes by the Italian supporters of Fascism: the cinema and the radio. Cinema turned out to be Italy's best propaganda weapon, and by the end of the 1930s the Direzione Generale operated a complicated system of film distribution that enabled the regime to reach all over the world even the smallest Italian community, 'wherever it was in our interest to be present'.61 The screening of propaganda films showing the public works and the military might of the regime began in Australia in 1932. By that year, the DIES (Direzione degli Italiani all'Estero) was already sending to the consulate-general in Sydney a considerable number of films 'to be utilised for propaganda work all over Australia'.62 Early in 1933 Consul-General Ferrante could proudly report to Mussolini that documentaries on the most important political events in Italy. such as the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the military parades and the gymnastic exercises of the Balilla, were shown almost weekly in the cinemas of Sydney. They were followed, in stark contrast, by films on the London clashes between the police and unemployed workers and by pictures of British children dressed in rags, thus emphasising, in Ferrante's opinion, the superior social system of Fascist Italy.63 Documentary films aroused the interest of the Italian communities in Australia, whose members came in numbers to their screening, especially in moments of great tension, either social or political, such as during xenophobic riots at Kalgoorlie in 1934 or during the Abvssinian conflict.64

Yet propaganda by means of the cinema was not coordinated nor managed very efficiently until the war in Abyssinia; there is ample evidence of its unsophisticated approach and of its shortcomings in distribution before the African conflict. For instance, Ferrante, in reporting to Mussolini the 'enormously successful' screening in Sydney and Griffith of the film Year IX, lamented that: 'the English subtitles are subject to ridicule, since the Italian text has been translated literally by the dictionary, its translator obviously having a scant, elementary knowledge of the language'.65 Moreover, most of the films were in Italian, thus limiting their propaganda effect to a restricted public, and excluding altogether from their influence the eventual Australian sympathisers. This disadvantage was often drawn to the attention of the Ministry for Press and Propaganda by the Italian consuls who rated the films as 'one of the most efficient means of propaganda in the Australian environment'.66 Furthermore, up to 1935 films as well as other kinds of propaganda material did not reach the consulates at regular intervals, thus slackening off the pace of the process of indoctrination that many consuls so strenuously strove to achieve: Anzilotti, in December 1935 protested to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda that his consulate 'had not received any propaganda film for the last eighteen months'.67

The Italo-Abyssinian conflict sped up the delivery of documentary films to Australia, and in the main they were favourably received by the majority of Italians; their nationalist and imperialist message whipped up the patriotism of the Italian community, which felt isolated and threatened by the Australian government's hostile policy towards Italy and by the animosity of a large section of Australian society against Italians, be they Fascists or not. Anzilotti reported that in Melbourne 'the enthusiasm for the screening of the films was enormous', and that 'at every screening hundreds of nationals were present, and many of them came even from the countryside for the occasion'.68

Nevertheless the consuls had to take into consideration the unfriendliness of Australian political circles, so the propaganda content of the films had to be less evident, while more emphasis on aspects readily acceptable to the Australian public was needed: for instance, 'films to be screened to Australians should mention our civilising mission in Ethiopia';⁶⁹ they should also imply that Italy was adopting policies that had been practised for centuries by the British

Empire. Also, propaganda must seem to be objective: favourable statements and opinions by neutrals and by people not connected with Fascism had to be given maximum diffusion. The film Abyssinia was considered by Rome to be particularly suitable to this purpose, because: 'filmed by the Swiss flier Mittelholzer, it is an excellent documentary effectively showing the state of barbarism of Abyssinia that can be a much more useful instrument of propaganda since it has been filmed by a foreigner'. 70 The Italian consuls did not limit their activities to the distribution of films: they also commissioned propaganda films to be produced in Australia. When the Italian cruiser Montecuccoli arrived in Sydney in 1938, the Melbourne consul, Arrighi, commissioned a Catholic film group to film the ceremonies in which the Italian officers and sailors took part during their stay in this city. 71 Cinema was used as a means of propaganda up to the outbreak of hostilities in June 1940, under the ever more watchful eve of the Commonwealth censor, to whom all films had to be submitted before screening and who did not hesitate to cut the objectionable or controversial political sections. 72 Yet all films and documentaries screened to Italians in Australia by the consuls contained the political messages of a 'new Italy', full of life, free from the evils besetting capitalist societies; they all glorified Italy's history, military might, cultural superiority and economic progress. They conformed to what Cornelio Di Marzio, one of the cultural eminences grises of the regime, believed was the role of this medium: that in a totalitarian state cinema cannot avoid being political cinema; indeed, it must reflect the ideals and political values of the regime. 'Films without a moral or ethical lesson', maintained Di Marzio, 'were not for the Italian public'.73

Radio propaganda reached Australia in the 1930s. Fascist Italy had been a pioneer in this field; at that time it probably had a keener sense of the importance of radio than any other country in the world. Programs in Italian and other languages, beamed to overseas countries, began in 1933, and a number of these programs were specially designed to sell Fascist ideology to Italians living there. The Fascist concept of the role of the radio was outlined in the yearbook of the EIAR (Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche) as follows:

Invincible as an arm of propaganda, disciplined and willing instrument of the Regime, the Italian radio brings to foreign peoples, together with news in foreign languages, information and precise and objective comments on Fascist reality, destroying legends and obliterating insidious falsehoods. Radio must be a great educator and in Italy it is ... It introduces itself wherever the idea of Italianness affirms itself.⁷⁴

An interesting method of extending Fascism abroad took the form of Italian lessons by radio. The texts for dictation were Mussolini's speeches. The listeners were asked to send their work to Rome for correction and the exercises came back to them with program announcements of the Italian radio and propaganda pamphlets.⁷⁵

The propaganda purpose of the radio broadcasts was openly admitted in Australia. In 1933 the consul-general, Ferrante, informed the Commonwealth government that the Agenzia Stefani of Rome was broadcasting daily official press news on political, economic and sporting events and that he wished to avail himself 'of this service to the purpose of supplying official news to the local newspapers'.76 Two years later, the consul-general requested permission to use the services of Amalgamated Wireless (A'asia) Ltd to intercept the short wave broadcasts of news by the Italian station at Coltano, and to use the scripts for propaganda purposes, but the request was turned down by the government on grounds that it represented a 'danger' and that it was detrimental to 'the interests of Empire security and defence'.77 All the same, by the end of 1936 Italian consulates were distributing to the press news bulletins put together with material received by means of short wave radio.78

No effort was spared by the Fascist authorities in Australia to use radio as a propaganda instrument. In September 1935 Anzilotti informed Rome that all expenses for intercepting Coltano radio would be met by the Italian community in Melbourne. In Victoria, the local branch of the Dante Alighieri Society approached the Australian Broadcasting Commission applying for permission to broadcast 'propaganda lectures on Italian history, literature, art and music'. In 1937 the Ministry for Press and Propaganda instructed the

EIAR to supply radio material to Chandler's Broadcasting Service of Brisbane, to be beamed by that company's Queensland radio stations.⁸¹ At the same time, Italian plays were sent to the Australian Broadcasting Commission because, as the consul-general, Vita-Finzi, remarked, 'the exercise should be useful to the purposes of propaganda in our favour'.⁸²

The same year, a committee of Italians approached the Sydney station 2SM asking for a weekly quarter hour to broadcast an 'Italian Session'. The committee consisted of Signor Rando, Secretary of the Sydney Fascist Branch; Dr Baccarini of the Dante Alighieri Society; Franco Battistessa of the Giornale Italiano, and Marco Panozzo. The enterprise was officially supported by the consular authorities.83 It was decided to spend the whole period of fifteen minutes on propaganda in defence of Italy and Italians. Also, considering the climate of hostility against Fascism, it was felt that a program purely of propaganda would not be permitted by the Commonwealth authorities, 'unless such propaganda were masked by a horse of Troy of cultural and travel material'.84 A subscription for financing the project was launched, and Italian broadcasts took place in Sydney up to the beginning of hostilities in 1940.

The prevailing tenor of Italian radio propaganda was well described in a memorandum by the British government at the end of 1937: its remarks can also be applied to Australia with regard to the short-wave transmissions from Coltano, to the local broadcasts and to the material supplied by Italy to Australian stations. The document concluded:

The general impression gathered during this short initial period of listening-in is of a well-balanced aggressive, yet subtle, presentation of carefully selected news items, often of dubious authority, dealing very largely with foreign affairs, and edited with a strong ideological bias, distasteful to democratic countries and particularly disagreeable to Great Britain.⁸⁵

By the end of 1936 the Italian authorities in Australia had built an efficient network of organisations through which propaganda was passed on to the public. To the fore were the Fascist branches, formed in all major Australian centres and in country areas where sizable Italian communities were present. 86 With the Fasci were associated subsidiary societies such as the Fasci femminili, the activities of which consisted of raising money, organising social events and maintaining contacts with Italian and Australian women; the Gruppi Giovanili, the Fascist Youth organisations; the Associazione Nazionale Combattenti, the Italian Returned Soldiers Association; the Italian Army and Navy Union; the Associazione Nazionale Alpini; the Società Dante Alighieri, which frequently contributed financially to the Fascio's efforts; the Universitaria Italiana, which encouraged universities to introduce the Italian language as a course;87 the clubs, such as the Club Italia and the Circolo Isole Eolie in Sydney, the Club Cavour in Melbourne, the Armando Diaz Club at Cairns, the Club Italiano at Fremantle; the newspapers: the Italian Chamber of Commerce; the Fascio's schools. Members of the consular staff were, without exception, on the executive committees of all these associations, appointed to control, guide and enforce the Italian government's policies. After the Abyssinian conflict the consulate-general moved to unite all these organisations and to co-ordinate their propaganda activities. The scheme included the purchase or construction of a Casa d'Italia in each major Australian centre. The underlying purpose was to group under one roof all Italian associations thus strengthening the national spirit of their members, maintaining the use of the Italian language and retarding Italians from assimilating Australian customs and ideals. Consul-General Vita-Finzi launched this project in Sydney on 15 August 1936 and funds were collected in this city in September of that year.88 The consul-general opened the list of donations with £50 while the Italia Shipping Line gave £100. Also, the Apostolic Delegate, Mons. G. Panico, promised his wholehearted authoritative support. All Italians were solicited for funds with circular letters, typical of them being the one issued by the Associazione Nazionale Combattenti in which the aims of the Casa d'Italia were outlined as being those of commemorating 'the great victory of our armies in Africa' and of perpetuating 'the ideals of the foundation of the Empire and the resistance of the Italian people against economic trials'.89 Although this

project was never fully realised, since *Case d'Italia* were opened only in Perth and Fremantle, the Ministry for Popular Culture lent its full support by sending to Australia books for the library of the future institution in Melbourne⁹⁰ and a film projector for the one in Sydney.⁹¹

Fascism in Australia did not limit its activities to the dissemination of propaganda by all possible means: it also controlled its effects by studying the reactions of the Italian community and by spying on its more active members. It was regarded as a fact amongst Italians that the consulates maintained 'a body of agents who report on the attitude of local Italians with regard to Fascism generally'.92 This suspicion was well founded; as we have seen, the consulgeneral knew of the location, activities and strength of all anti-Fascists and in his police work he was aided not only by his agents and informers, but also by the federal government.93 In addition Italian Fascists resorted to defamation and slander as a means of weakening anti-Fascist propaganda by exposing the character and personal life of their enemies: evidence of this was given by the Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch in a report to the Prime Minister in which he pointed out that:

we have received in the past numerous allegations against Italians throughout the Commonwealth, which very often narrowed down to the fact that such Italians have earned the displeasure of their consular authorities or compatriots and have been classified as undesirable, through refusal to become ardent and active Fascists. 94

By 1937 the Fascist officials extended their surveillance not only to anti-Fascists but also to people who had applied for the certificate of naturalisation because they were disillusioned with Fascism or they feared to remain Italian citizens in an environment hostile to Italy and her policies. In April 1937 the Italian vice-consul at Townsville, L. Chieffi, approached the Brisbane branch of the CIB and asked for full particulars and photographs of two Italians who had become naturalised British subjects. His request prompted H. E. Jones, Director of the CIB, to warn the Department of External Affairs that 'some steps are being taken' by the Italian authorities 'to

establish a system of record of Italians who have adopted British nationality'.95

A large part of Fascist propaganda in Australia was busy counteracting and dispelling hostile and anti-Fascist propaganda coming from Italian and Australian sources. It is unquestionable that the consular authorities felt 'very hurt over the unfriendly tone of the Australian press, even down to Communist publications'. ⁹⁶ When Captain V. B. Brocchieri of the Fascist Party headquarters in Italy came to Australia on a tour of inspection of Fascist organisations, he visited the offices of the *Bulletin* and *Sun* newspapers, strongly critical of Fascism, and volunteered to supply 'true' information on Italian policies, to combat the alleged falsehoods that these newspapers were publishing and that he considered 'detrimental to Italy's interests'. ⁹⁸

The Italian diplomats often protested to the Australian government against propaganda hostile to Fascism. Grossardi several times complained of the freedom that Italian Communists and Anarchists enjoyed in distributing anti-Fascist propaganda⁹⁹ and so did Ferrante; in 1936 Vita-Finzi made representations against the unfriendly content of some radio programs on Italy's foreign policy which he described as 'fantastic and offensive' and 'likely to create an atmosphere of unfriendliness, and to disturb the good relations between the two countries': Mammalella in 1939 strongly objected to a play staged in Melbourne, allegedly containing remarks offensive to the Italian Army.2 Anzilotti in his capacity as acting consul-general in 1937 protested against an anti-Italian article in Truth, claiming that the 'contemptible utterances' of this 'disreputable newspaper' would 'arouse ill-feeling among a community which numbers several thousands and possibly lead to regrettable incidents'.3

Another reason for the growth of Fascist propaganda and its nervous, brash, almost violent style can be detected in the difficulties, frustrations and isolation encountered by Fascist propagandists in a community and a society increasingly hostile to their efforts.⁴ Indeed, a great number of Italians maintained an ambiguous posture: they conspicuously took part in Fascist meetings, cheered the speeches of their leaders and accepted propaganda material, but on the other hand

sought naturalisation and became involved in Australian activities.⁵ Thus Italians, although they were the targets of a capillary system of propaganda, proved refractory to it: they all declared themselves Fascists, while in fact they were not; they all raised their hands in the Fascist salute and applauded at the right moment, in effect they were indifferent. This state of affairs was realised by Mammalella as he reported to the Ministry for Popular Culture that his 'most urgent problem is that of reviving the Italianness of a colony already in a most advanced stage of Australian naturalisation'.⁶

The Australian political world turned out to be far more impervious to the penetration of Fascist propaganda. Since the Abyssinian conflict, the Australian press remained constantly hostile to Italy, her policies and to the representatives of Fascism abroad. The Melbourne consul, Arrighi, admitted that it was 'very difficult, if not impossible' to have articles explaining the Italian point of view printed by the Australian press. Australian political circles were also adamant in their rejection of the totalitarian methods employed by the Italian government in its expansionist adventures: their opposition was deeply resented by the Fascist consuls, who sometimes reacted sharply to their self-inflicted position of diplomatic isolation.

Granted the obvious restrictions imposed by the political situation and by the apathy of the Italian community, what then were the aims that the Italian authorities hoped to achieve by spreading Fascist propaganda in Australia? In a letter to the Director-General of Propaganda, Celesia, the Melbourne consul, Arrighi, confessed that he wanted to muster the élite of the politically-minded Italians and to form in Australia, 'among approximately 30,000 resident Italians, a core of 5-10,000 propagandists, good, efficient, tough and determined'.9 In short, he aimed at creating a Fascist fifth column. His aspiration was in line with the propaganda policies pursued by the Italian Fascist government. In July 1938 a secret circular letter was sent by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to all Italian diplomatic representatives abroad instructing them to form propaganda nuclei to be put in action 'in case of mobilisation', whose duties would be to: 'potentiate to the highest degree the Fascist national feeling of Italians; to influence the local public opinion, and to obtain when possible useful information; to carry out anti-Communist propaganda'. There is no evidence to the effect that any of these nuclei were formed in Australia, and Arrighi's hopes did not materialise. Yet the absence in this country of a formal, secretive, para-military intelligence organisation such as the NuPIE (*Nuclei di Propaganda Italiana all'Estero*) did not mean that their aims were not pursued, as the Minister for Popular Culture, Alfieri, did not fail to point out in his Report on the Propaganda Nuclei at Home and Abroad in February 1939. 11

In the final analysis, Fascist propaganda in Australia suffered from the strictures imposed upon it by an unnecessary duplication of efforts: co-ordination of intents between the various Italian associations and even between an association and its sister branch in another state was never totally achieved. What Cornelio Di Marzio complained about to Ciano in 1934 concerning propaganda abroad could be considered specifically relevant to the general propaganda situation in Australia, where 'today everybody makes propaganda . . . from the *Fasci* to the Dante . . . everybody does what he wants to and as he wants to'. 12

Notwithstanding the unavoidable failures of performance and the defects inherent in its organisation, if the overall degree of success of Fascist propaganda in Australia is — as it must be — to be measured in terms of its achievements in relation to its declared aims, it is very hard not to be impressed by the considerable success which favoured the Italian authorities in this continent. Gheisser Celesia, Director-General of Propaganda, wrote in 1938 that the function of his department was that of a 'brain, that should intelligently and speedily motivate to action other organisations outside itself; and the publications, the articles, the photographs, etc., should be a necessary medium, but not the essential part of our activities'. Ottaviano Armando Koch, Director-General of Propaganda in 1940, went further by adding that propaganda should:

validly contribute to the activities aimed at clarifying the principles and the ordinances of the Regime; document in a fresh and effective way its practical results; fight the

preconceived suspicions against Fascism and the hostile propaganda; collaborate with other organisations for a wider diffusion of Italian culture abroad. 14

Fascism in Australia achieved all the goals hoped for by Celesia and Koch, and the various aspects of its success are quite obvious.

A remarkable degree of control was achieved over the Italian community, which, willingly or unwillingly, conformed to the guidelines of Fascist propaganda, took part in Fascist meetings, gave their money to Fascist causes, educated their children under the regime's ideological supervision. So well advertised was their allegiance to Fascism (whether it was sincerely felt or not is another matter), that for no other reason, at the beginning of hostilities, scores of Italians were interned. Fascist propaganda held the Italian migrant under a spell, notwithstanding their efforts to assimilate into Australian society.

Fascist propaganda was also successful in arousing a large amount of sympathy for the cause of Italy among many influential Australians, who saw in Fascism the only effective alternative to Communism and to what they considered a decadent and weak democratic parliamentary system. Men of repute such as Archbishop Duhig, Eric Campbell, Archbishop Mannix, F. M. Bruxner, significantly contributed to orient the public in favour of the doctrines preached by the Italian regime.

Moreover, the vitality of Fascist propaganda in Australia was reflected in the constant concern of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch for its activities. The branch controlled all written propaganda, screened all political meetings held by Italians, planted agents in the midst of their communities, reported to the government on the contacts of the Italian diplomats with their nationals, shadowed all Fascists involved in political activities.

Furthermore, the enforcers of Fascist propaganda were able to gain the tactical advantage of maintaining the initiative in the war of ideas by persisting in their attacks against their enemies and detractors. The constant repeating ad nauseam of Fascist oriented interpretation of current events slowly instilled in the minds of many the idea that there had to be at

least some element of truth in Fascist propaganda. It is possible to see, then, why many people in Australia, although opposed to this totalitarian ideology, stood in admiration and awe of Fascist propaganda and of its dynamic aspects. Many were caught by its 'spirit of daring and audacity', by its 'brilliant inventiveness, both of phrase and of manner', by the 'kind of realism, in the midst of its most sweeping generalisations, which keep it moving and live'. Many felt its 'ad hoc character, as if it were not wholly shackled by the chains of a closed and completed system', but could 'grow and fit itself to the kaleidoscopic change and the opportunities of practical affairs'. 15

Italy's entry into World War II on the Axis side abruptly stopped all Fascist propaganda activities in Australia. The sudden collapse of the intricate network of agencies which advocated the Italian point of view cannot be attributed to deficiencies inherent in its structure nor to misjudgments of the objective political situation, but to the unavoidable development of Italian foreign policy which, after the Pact of Steel, was bent on the collision course that led to war against the democracies. On the contrary, the degree of success of Fascist propaganda in Australia can be detected, for instance, in the indisputable fact that even after the outbreak of hostilities, even in the internment camps, Italians held onto their belief that Fascism was synonymous with Italy and that, their country right or wrong, they could not turn away from it. particularly in wartime, because this would have meant betraying their Fatherland.

Even more important for its lasting implications is the political inheritance that Fascist propaganda left to Italians in this country: namely the condition that alienated them from exercising their duty to question any government's right to rule on all political, moral and intellectual aspects of their life. Fascist propaganda hammered for years the slogan that Italians abroad, if they wanted to be respected by their host countries, must be proud of Italy's achievements, which were Fascism's achievements, since no nation would consider worth accepting as a new citizen any detractor of his previous country of origin.

The logic of this proposition, although politically invalid,

stuck in the minds of Italians in Australia, who willingly and irresponsibly delegated to the propaganda machine of the regime that they had abetted, the job of thinking for their own sake.

Notes

1 Mussolini in B. Vigezzi (ed.) 1919-25. Dopoguerra e Fascismo, Bari, 1965, pp. 425-6.

2 Italo-Australian, 30 Dec. 1922.

3 Ibid., With the advent of Fascism, the *Ufficio Stampa* became an important political instrument, its task being that of controlling the opposition press. On 9 Aug. 1923 the *Ufficio Stampa* was put under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, who did not fail to grasp its significance to the purpose of press propaganda at home and abroad. For an outline of Fascism's cultural policy, see Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Burocrazia e politica culturale nello stato fascista: il Ministero della cultura popolare', *Storia Contemporanea*, Year I, No. 2, June 1970, pp. 277-8.

4 USNAID, T586/1118/073832.

5 Cornelio Di Marzio, Il Fascismo all'Estero, Milano, 1923, p. 20.

6 Ibid., p. 41.

7 On this, see Adrian Lyttelton, The Seizure of Power, London, 1973, pp. 379-401.

8 Italo-Australian, 21 April 1923.

9 Ibid., 28 July, 7 Aug. and 14 Aug. 1923.

10 Ibid., 7 June 1924.

11 Ibid., 4 Aug. 1923.

12 Ibid., 7 June 1924; cf. ibid., 24 March 1923.

- 13 In February he launched a subscription in favour of the Italian repayment of war debts (Italo-Australian, 13 Feb. 1926), in March he attacked the Australian Trade Union movement for its opposition to Fascism (ibid., 27 March 1926) and also spoke at the Dante Alighieri on Rome's imperial destiny (ibid., 24 April 1926); in August he addressed a crowd at Sydney's Lyceum Theatre on 'Italy today' (ibid., 21 Aug. 1926); on 20 Sept. he spoke at a public ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the Italian Unity (ibid., 27 Sept. 1926) while on 22 Oct. celebrated the Fascist March on Rome with a lecture at the Royal Society (ibid., 25 Oct. 1926); in December he spoke at the Club Italia at Lithgow (ibid., 6 Dec. 1926), and so on.
- 14 Italo-Australian, 9 May 1927.
- 15 USNAID, T586/1122/074445.
- 16 USNAID, T586/1122/074570.
- 17 Balbino Giuliano, L'opera e la missione della Dante Alighieri, Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri, Rome, 1929, p. 4.

- 18 Philip V. Cannistraro, 'Il cinema italiano sotto il fascismo', Storia Contemporanea, Year III, No. 3, Sept. 1972, p. 417.
- 19 Italo-Australian, 21 April 1928.
- 20 Ibid., 9 Feb. 1929.
- 21 Mussolini in Asvero Gravelli, Verso l'Internazionale Fascista, Rome, 1932, pp. 31-2.
- 22 Ibid., p. 228.
- 23 Piero Parini, 'Roma ritorna Ritorna a Roma', Sole d'Italia: Letture Classe V, Rome, 1935, p. 137.
- 24 AA, CRS A981, Fascism 4, CIB to External Affairs, 4 Jan. 1937.
- 25 The first declaration of the charter stated that 'in the moral, political and economic unity of the Italian nation, completely achieved by the Fascist State, the School, instrument of cohesion of all social forces, from the family to the Corporation, to the Party, shapes the human and political consciousness of the new generations', while the second declaration went further by pointing out that 'in the Fascist order, school age and political age coincide. School, GIL and GUF are, together, an instrument of Fascist education' (USNAID, T586/1112/075017).
- 26 Australian Intelligence clearly saw the political instrumentality of the Italian schools. One of its officers, Lieutenant J. M. Allison, reported that Italians in Australia were compelled by the consular authorities to 'set up Italian schools and send their children to them. The teachers of such schools must be members of the Fascist Party. Their children are also to be organised in the GILE, the organisation for youth abroad corresponding to the ONB in its wider aspect in Italy' (AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/97).
- 27 In his book on the New Guard, Eric Campbell recollects that 'my only source of information in Sydney [on Fascism, NdA.] was Dr Baccarini, a cultured Italian gentleman who happened to be a client of mine. From him I borrowed quite a lot of literature on the subject. It was of the propaganda type, mostly pamphlets in both Italian and English and even after discounting the bias of the enthusiastic protagonist authors I liked what I read' (Campbell, The Rallying Point, p. 131).
- 28 The Melbourne Consulate received in May 1935 the following material:

ten copies of the History of the Fascist Movement

thirty copies of the Corporate Economy

twenty copies of the Four Speeches on the Corporate State

by Mussolini

thirty copies of the Labour Charter

ten copies of the Corporate Organisation and Structure,

hardly literature sufficient to inform and influence a community of thousands of Italians (Italy — Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dello Cultura Popolare (hereafter ACS, Minculpop).

- Busta 257, Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda (hereafter DGSP) to Melbourne consulate, 20 May 1935).
- ACS, Minculpop 257, Ferrante to Mussolini. 6 Dec. 1934. 29
- 30 USNAID, T586/466/031798. The same report stated that 'today in the event of an outbreak of hostilities the propaganda network abroad is formed by 132 Nuclei and 569 activists' (USNAID. T586/466/031797).
- USNAID, T586/466/031812. 31
- 32 ACS, Minculpop 257, DGSP to Sydney consulate-general, 23 April 1936; DGSP to Melbourne consulate, 22 April 1936. The Direzione Generale was quite aware of the fact that in countries such as Australia, where there was a large amount of hostility against Italy, the disclosure of the source of supply of such material would have aroused immediate suspicion of the trustworthiness of same (USNAID, T586/466/031819). Therefore the Direzione Generale assiduously appealed to its agents abroad to 'proceed in their work of continuous and deep penetration in an "impersonal" manner (USNAID, T586/466/031871).
- 33 Among the people who received such literature were Michael Frederick Bruxner, Deputy Premier of NSW; the Hon. H. E. Manning, MLC, Attorney-General of NSW; Sir Daniel Levy, former Attorney-General in the first Stevens-Bruxner Ministry; Mr C. Lloyd Jones of David Jones Ltd; Mr W. J. Cleary of the Australian Broadcasting Commission; Mr H. E. Drummond of the Department of Education; Monsignor J. Duhig, Archbishop of Brisbane: Professor E. G. Waterhouse of the University of Sydney: Colonel Eric Campbell, leader of the New Guard: the Hon. F. R. Jordan of the Supreme Court of NSW.
- USNAID, T586/466/031812. 34
- 35 Ibid., T586/466/031807.
- ACS, Minculpop 257, DGSP to Melbourne consulate, 30 March 36 1937.
- 37 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 25 Nov. 1936. In its reply the ministry assured Anzilotti that in future he would receive propaganda literature more regularly and speedily (ibid., Alessandrini to Anzilotti, 23 Dec. 1936).
- Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 11 March 1936.
- 39 Consul-General Vita-Finzi could thus inform Rome that he succeeded in having published by the Sydney Morning Herald an article on 'Abyssinia - Mandate B', but that, 'in order to conceal its obvious propaganda character, I have arranged to have it rewritten and published under his name by our subject Luigi Gariglio'. Vita-Finzi enthusiastically explained that 'the Sydney Morning Herald is the most read and important daily newspaper of Australia, completely subservient to the interests of British conservatives; never before had it printed articles

illustrating our point of view on the Ethiopian problem' (ibid., Vita-Finzi to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 15 Feb. 1936).

40 USNAID, T586/466/031898.

41 Antonio Baccarini, What For?, Melbourne, 1936, p. 12.

- 42 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, Hodgson to CIB, 24 June 1936. Also, ibid., item Abyssinia 50 (old), Jones to External Affairs, 28 July 1936.
- 43 AA, CRS A981, item Abyssinia 30, Pearce to Vitali, 10 Sept. 1935.

44 Ibid., Pearce to Anzilotti, 30 Sept. 1935.

- 45 The Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch described him as 'an Italian who came to Australia from Italy as a woolbuyer in September 1934... Gremmo is an educated man holding Fascist views on modern Italy' (ibid., Jones to External Affairs, 8 Nov. 1935).
- 46 Ibid.; also, see ibid., Pearce to Vita-Finzi, 13 May 1936.

47 USNAID, T586/466/031877.

- 48 Arrighi reported that Jackson 'has always been a firm friend of Italy, especially during the difficult period of the Ethiopian conquest, and also later on he has never lost nor loses the chance to write intelligently on Italy and on international problems from the Italian standpoint' (ACS, Minculpop 257, Arrighi to Ministry for Popular Culture, 15 Dec. 1937).
- 49 Ibid., Vita-Finzi to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 16 Dec. 1936.
- 50 Ibid., Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 18 Sept. 1936. In his report on the Ministry's activities for the year 1937, the Director-General of Propaganda, Gheisser Celesia, admitted that in cases such as that of the Sydney Art Exhibition, 'having to deal with a country in which it is risky, to the success of any enterprise, to attribute to it even the slightest propaganda character, the paternity of the Exhibition has been left to the *Biennale*, an exclusively artistic body, although this Administration has financed and organised it' (USNAID, T586/466/031844).

51 ACS, Minculpop 257, Costantino to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 12 Oct. 1936.

- 52 The donation was recommended by the Melbourne consul, Anzilotti, who declared that 'considering the peculiar conditions of this political environment, I think that such propaganda would be very effective and useful to our country' (ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 30 April 1935).
- 53 Ibid., Ministry for Press and Propaganda to Miss King, 31 March 1936.
- 54 Ibid., Ministry for Popular Culture to Sydney consulate-general, 14 Feb. 1938.
- 55 Ibid., Luciano to Senise, 1 June 1935.

- 56 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 3 April 1937. Similar assistance was given by the Ministry for Press and Propaganda to George S. Dempster, Engineer of the Victorian Roads Board, who in 1937 went to Italy on a study tour (ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 16 Feb. 1937). The Italian vice-consul of Perth, Costantino, signalled to Rome the impending visit of Ivor Cardell-Oliver, son of a conservative MP of the Western Australian State Parliament, who was interested in Italy's production methods of synthetic wool, Lanital. The diplomat suggested that 'it would be opportune and useful to assist as far as possible' Mr Cardell-Oliver, since 'it is probable that in future he will enter the political life of this State' (ibid., Costantino to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 3 April 1937).
- 57 Ibid., Arrighi to Celesia, 4 June 1937. Similarly, Eva Webb-Jones, wife of the Italian singer A. Marotta, daughter of the editor of the New Zealand Wanganui Herald and member of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, who went to Italy in order to write articles on the general situation of the country, was granted 'every possible facilitation' by the Ministry for Popular Culture since 'she is motivated by a deep feeling of Italianità and has already carried out in Australia propaganda work in our favour' (ibid., Tommasi to Depretis, 17 Sept. 1937).
- 58 Campbell, The Rallying Point, p. 136.
- 59 H. M. Moran, Letters from Rome, Sydney, 1935, p. 7.
- 60 ACS, Minculpop 257, Ufficio Stampa, Sezione Propaganda, Notes for the Duce. 13 April 1934.
- 61 USNAID, T586/466/031912.
- 62 ACS, Minculpop 257, Parini to Anzilotti, 6 Sept. 1932. From this letter it is evident that at this stage the distribution of propaganda films was not properly co-ordinated by the consulate-general of Sydney. The Melbourne consul asked Rome to send directly to him some propaganda films, but was refused.
- 63 Ibid., Ferrante to Mussolini, 10 Jan. 1933. In the same letter the consul-general commented that these documentaries 'constitute an efficient form of propaganda' on the viewers, among whom were many politicians and businessmen. Also, Ferrante informed the Duce that he was in 'excellent rapport with many of the most important owners and directors of local theatres and will take every opportunity for letting them know the merits of our Cinema'.
- 64 Consul-General Ferrante arranged to have the film Year IX screened 'as a propaganda exercise among the Italian and Australian communities' at Kalgoorlie and Boulder soon after the racial riots that took place in these towns in 1934 (ibid., Ferrante to Mussolini, 3 July 1934).
- 65 Ibid., Ferrante to Mussolini, 5 Oct. 1933.

- 66 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 6 Dec. 1935; cf. ibid., Vita-Finzi to Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 12 Dec. 1935.
- 67 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 6 Dec. 1935.
- 68 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 15 May 1936. See also Anzilotti's letter in which he observed that 'films in Italian showing current events, public works, sport, etc., are the best means of propaganda and are highly rated by our subjects, many of whom have not seen Italy for years. The films ... have been screened in many Australian cities and in the most important country centres where groups of co-nationals are living, and everywhere they have been shown to a crowded audience of Italians' (ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 10 Nov. 1936).
- 69 Ibid., Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 15 May 1936.
- 70 Ibid., De Peppo to Melbourne consulate, 28 March 1936.
- 71 Ibid., Arrighi to Ministry for the Navy, 25 June 1938.
- 72 Ibid., Vita-Finzi to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 14 July 1936.
- 73 Cannistraro, 'Il cinema Italiano', p. 444.
- 74 Quoted in Charles J. Rolo, Radio Goes to War, London, 1943, pp. 105-6.
- 75 Ibid., p. 47.
- 76 AA, CRS A1608, item F14/1/3, Ferrante to J. G. Latham, 6 Dec. 1933.
- 77 Ibid., External Affairs to Italian Consul-General, 14 Oct. 1935. Also cf. ibid., C. L. Baillieu to J. A. Lyons, 19 Feb. 1934; and AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 367.
- 78 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, CIB to External Affairs, 4 Jan. 1937.
- 79 ACS, Minculpop 257, Anzilotti to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 12 Sept. 1935.
- 80 Ibid., Dante Alighieri Society to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 26 June 1936.
- 81 Ibid., Celesia to EIAR, 9 Feb. 1937.
- 82 Ibid., Vita-Finzi to Ministry for Press and Propaganda, 16 Dec. 1936. Also, cf. ibid., Celesia to Sydney consulate-general, 9 Feb. 1937.
- 83 Cf. Il Giornale Italiano, 20 Oct. 1937. The Commonwealth Investigation Branch reported that 'this sort of propaganda had the approval of the Italian Consulate and the principal movers in the matter are Fascists' (AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 5, CIB to External Affairs, 27 Oct. 1937).
- 84 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 5, CIB to External Affairs, 27 Oct. 1937.

- 85 Ibid., British Government Memorandum R7027/1/22 dated 20 Oct. 1937.
- 86 All Fasci were named after a Fascist fallen during Fascism's struggle for the conquest of power in 1919-22, or a Gold Medallist of the campaigns in Abyssinia or Spain. The Australian branches were the Luigi Platania in Sydney; Gino Lisa in Melbourne; Giuseppe Degal in Brisbane; Armando Bergossi in Adelaide; Paolo Solariol in Cairns; Domenico Picca at Port Pirie; Edmondo Mazzuoli in Babinda; Riccardo Cittarelli in Perth; Nicola Nisco at Innisfail; Giuseppe Carli in Fremantle. There were also a number of Fascist sections at smaller country places such as Stanthorpe, Texas, Coffs Harbour, Port Wakefield, Werribee, Wonthaggi, Rabaul (AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/97, Intelligence Report, 7 Aug. 1943).
- Fascist activities were conspicuous at some universities. At the University of Melbourne, B. A. Santamaria, then a law student, was the leader of the group which promoted Fascism among the students and disrupted anti-Fascist meetings at the university. He also edited the *Catholic Worker*, a strongly anti-Communist Church organ (Judah Waten, interview, 29 May 1973).

88 Italian Bulletin of Australia, Aug. 1936, p. 6.

- 89 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, CIB to External Affairs, 4 Jan. 1937.
- 90 ACS, Minculpop 257, Arrighi to Celesia, 11 March 1938.

91 Ibid., Celesia to L. Freddi, 21 Sept. 1938.

- 92 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, CIB to External Affairs, 4 Jan. 1937.
- 93 When Consul-General Ferrante wrote to the Minister for External Affairs, J. G. Latham, that he had been 'confidentially informed' that an Italian was 'actively engaged in anarchist propaganda' and asked him to supply him 'with information as to the identity of this man, his political and moral behaviour', he received total assistance from the Australian authorities. Ironically, while the Commonwealth Investigation Branch was unable to trace the man's whereabouts, it was given his address by the consul-general who had his own sources of information (AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 365, Ferrante to Latham, 3 Nov. 1933; ibid., R. G. Casey to Ferrante, 6 April 1934; ibid., Ferrante to External Affairs, 29 Jan. 1934).

94 Ibid., CIB to Prime Minister's Dept, 12 Jan. 1934.

- 95 AA, CRS A981, item Nationality and Naturalisation 43, CIB to External Affairs, 30 April 1937. The two Italians were Ugo Biondi and Severino Cazzulino, both Communists (ibid., CIB to External Affairs, 7 Oct. 1937).
- 96 Ibid., item Fascism 7, CIB to External Affairs, 10 June 1937.

97 Ibid.

98 He even called the attention of the Apostolic Delegate to the 'violent anti-religious propaganda and vulgar insults against priests and ministers of the Church' printed in the newspaper La Riscossa and solicited the Commonwealth government to suppress the sheet and to 'take action against its printers and publishers' (AA, CRS A432, item 1932/320, Grossardi to Prime Minister's Dept, 1 June 1930; also, cf. ibid., Prime Minister's Dept to Attorney-General, 5 Feb. 1929).

99 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 360, Vita-Finzi to External

Affairs, 20 May 1936.

- AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 364, Mammalella to J. A. Lyons, 6 Feb. 1939. The play, *Idiot's Delight*, condemned war and the private manufacture of munitions, and one of the characters referred to certain soldiers, who were presumably Italians, as swine. In rejecting Mammalella's protest, the Prime Minister scored a point by drawing the diplomat's attention to the fact that by censoring the incriminating passages, as the latter suggested, he would 'direct public opinion attention much more widely to the banned passages and in that way have the opposite effect to that desired by those who take exception to the context' (ibid., J. A. Lyons to Mammalella, 7 Feb. 1939).
- 2 AA, CRS A981, item Consuls 361, Anzilotti to External Affairs, 25 March 1937. Also, cf. ibid., Anzilotti to External Affairs, 31 Oct. 1935; ibid., Anzilotti to External Affairs, 16 Nov. 1935; ibid., Vita-Finzi to External Affairs, 3 Dec. 1935. The editor of Truth, approached by the Commonwealth on the matter, curtly objected that whilst the acting consul-general for Italy was 'perhaps, to be pardoned for falling into the error of thinking that Governments, or politicians, in a democratic country are held in any great awe by newspapers', he should be informed that 'the press of Australia asks nobody's permission before it criticises even its own Government, let alone that of another country' (ibid., F. V. McGuinness to External Affairs, 7 April 1937).
- 3 In 1937 Celesia ordered the intensification of the propaganda effort 'in those countries where contingent political necessities would demand it and where most markedly hostility and incomprehension was shown towards us' (USNAID, T586/466/031819).
- 4 Australian Intelligence reported that 'the majority of the Italian community in Sydney does not want to be identified with the Fascist movement by Australian people and neither do they want to be regarded by the leaders of the Italian Fascisti as indifferent to their country's welfare so accordingly they attend a victory celebration and subscribe small donations to the Red Cross' (AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 4, CIB to External Affairs, 4 Jan. 1937).
- 5 ACS, Minculpop 257, Mammalella to Ministry for Popular Culture, 11 Aug. 1938.

170 Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia

- 6 Ibid., Arrighi to Ministry for Popular Culture, 13 Jan. 1938. The accuracy of this statement is confirmed by a report of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch stating that 'there is not one newspaper here which has ever given the benefit of the doubt to Italy as, we believe, is the case in England. The Italian newspaper published in Sydney, *Il Giornale Italiano*, needless to say, publishes what the consular authorities wish it to, and attacks the combined press of Australia. It circulates among Italians and influences no one but Italians who wish so to be' (AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 7, CIB to External Affairs, 10 July 1937).
- 7 The Melbourne consul, Arrighi, for instance, described the Australians' dismay at the ruthless Fascist warfare in Spain as an over-reaction by 'political circles of old, wilted virgins who are moved by few bombs fallen on Guernica' (ACS, Minculpop 257, Arrighi to Celesia, 5 May 1937).
- 8 Ibid., Arrighi to Celesia, 2 Dec. 1937.
- 9 USNAID, T586/460/032808.
- 10 Alfieri remarked that 'to some of our consular representatives it has not been possible to form nuclei owing to the lack of a sizable Italian community and also for conditions peculiar to the local political environment; nevertheless these factors have not hindered in those countries our propaganda activity, that is carried out by members of our Diplomatic Missions' (ibid., T586/460/032809).
- 11 Quoted in Cannistraro, 'Burocrazia e politica culturale nello stato fascista', p. 281.
- 12 USNAID, T586/466/031859.
- 13 Ibid., T586/466/031877.
- 14 F. C. Bartlett, Political Propaganda, Cambridge, 1940, p. 42.

8The War Years

. . . there will be hell let loose here very soon.

(Internee, Loveday Camp, December 1942)

Italy's declaration of war on Great Britain and France was not unexpected by Italians in Australia. The representatives of the Italian government had been aware of this possibility since early May 1940, when they began destroying the documents of the consular files. When, at dawn of 11 June 1940, news reached Australia of the declaration of war, the consuls hurriedly burned the last compromising documents, minutes before the consulates were closed down by officers of the Security Service and Army Intelligence.¹

The members of the Fasci and the Italian communities had been forewarned by Fascist propaganda and by consular officials of the possibility of Italy's entering the conflict as an ally of Germany. The Adelaide vice-consul, Felice Rando, was reported as stating on 23 March 1940, at a secret meeting of Italians at Port Pirie, that Italy 'would soon begin the war on the side of Germany'. Therefore, most Italians were not surprised when they were visited, on the morning of 11 June, by police and security service officers who came to arrest them.

The methods of identification, arrest and internment had been worked out in August 1939 and the necessary legislation had been passed soon after. Since the end of August 1939, a special branch with the task of screening Italian and German nationals had been formed at the police headquarters of all capital cities at the request of the military authorities,³ and the number of its officers had risen considerably in the following months. For instance, the Sydney branch increased its strength from 150 men in September 1939 to 250 in September 1940.⁴

The task confronting these special branches proved a formidable one, given the large number of Italian migrants in this country, but they worked hard and fast, and by November 1939 the Victorian branch could report having screened over 12,000 aliens.⁵ The branches' findings allowed Military Intelligence to group all Italians under categories according to their suspected capacity of being a security risk. Category A included all people suspected of espionage (A1), of belonging to the Italian armed forces (A2), of association with Communist organisations (A3), of association with foreign political societies such as the Fascist Party (A4), and of association with criminal groups such as the Mafia (A5). Category B comprised all people connected with shipping, port or harbour works (B1), with transportation or communication systems (B2), with factories for war material (B3), with public utilities (B4) or with other occupations affording opportunities for sabotage or espionage (B5). Category C included all leaders and people of influence in the Italian community, while category D included all Italian males of military age, capable of bearing arms. Under category O were listed all ordinary harmless persons.6

Well before the outbreak of the conflict, the Australian army had prepared detention orders, under the National Security Regulations, for all Italians who were classified under A, B and C categories, while detention of people grouped under D category was considered on the merits of each particular case. For instance, none of the seventy-five Italians in the Northern Territory, although belonging to Category D, was interned because, as the Commanding Officer of the Seventh Military District reported: 'most of them ... are in such isolated

country that they are virtually interned now. They are in desert country, 250 miles from the nearest settlement, and can travel only by truck or camel'.

Italians who had become British subjects were still treated as Italian citizens and their activities were scrutinised with great care. The security service did not believe in the sincerity of their oath of allegiance to the Crown because many of these naturalised Italians were still active members of Italian Fascist organisations in Australia. For example, in 1939 out of the total membership of 300 of the Sydney *Fascio*, approximately one third were naturalised British subjects.⁸

When war broke out, the internment machine sprang into action. With the exception of Victoria, where only the militant Fascists were arrested (most probably because of Archbishop Mannix's strong appeals in support of Italians), internment was carried out on a large scale, and in some instances people were interned for no other reason than their foreign birth. The most distinguished Italian internee was Prince Alfonso Del Drago, who had been president of the Italian ex-Servicemen's Association and a member of the Sydney Fascio. Prince Del Drago had the honour of being the only internee whom the Italian government attempted to exchange with Australian prisoners in its custody. On 8 August 1940, the Japanese consul-general informed the Australian government that Italy was interested in the exchange but, because the Italian government did not hold as prisoner or internee an Australian of sufficient importance, no exchange took place.9 Other Italians interned were the sailors and passengers of two Italian ships, the Remo and the Romolo, which were still in Australian waters at that time, since their sailing had been delayed by Australian port authorities. This delay was not accidental: Canberra had been instructed by London to hamper the departure of Italian ships by any possible means. 10 It followed that on 11 June 1940, the Remo was seized at Fremantle¹¹ and its 125 passengers and crew were interned in Western Australia. 12 The Romolo had left Brisbane on 5 June but on 12 June she was located in mid-Pacific by a vessel of the Royal Australian Navy, whereupon the Romolo was set on fire by her crew and scuttled. The crew and passengers were picked up by the Australian ship and brought to Townsville, where they were interned.¹³

By 10 August 1940, 1.901 Italians had been interned, of whom more than half. 1.044, were in Western Australia alone. By now the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence began doubting the wisdom of this policy of — in many instances — indiscriminate internment in the interests of national security. 14 Following public protests and appeals by migrants, by November 1940 Italians could appeal against their internment to an Aliens Tribunal. At this time 1.544 Italian citizens were interned together with 182 naturalised Italians, and their number dropped slightly in the next twelve months only to increase dramatically after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. At the beginning of 1942, scores of Italians in Queensland were interned and the number of Italian internees reached a wartime maximum of 3.651 in September 1942.15 Thereafter, as the danger of a Japanese invasion disappeared, they were steadily released, and by September 1944 only 135 hard-core Fascists remained in the internment camps, while 3.510 Italians out of whom 711 were naturalised, had been freed. 16

Life in the internment camps was not physically burdensome for the internees. From the various detailed reports prepared by the International Red Cross Delegate in Australia, George W. Morel. 17 it is quite clear that the treatment of the internees by the Australian authorities was excellent and that the relations between the internees and the garrison troops were cordial. Accommodation, clothing and food were satisfactory or even of first-class quality. The food rations had been established taking into consideration the eating habits of Italians, and the selection of the particular items of food had been fixed by common agreement between the authorities and the internees. The camps had an infirmary, a library, a café, a canteen, a recreational and devotional hut, school huts and a workshop. Each camp had also a Catholic chaplain. Theatrical performances and concerts were organised regularly, in addition to film screenings which took place every week. The sporting facilities were also good. Camp 1A at Tatura, for instance, where in 1945 there were still fifty-six Italian internees, had three tennis courts, a gymnasium and a football ground. 18

Neutral observers¹⁹ and even Fascist officials acknowledged that the Australian military authorities were adhering scrupulously to the Geneva Convention with regard to the treatment of civilian internees: Melbourne Consul Luciolli admitted, after visiting one of these camps in June 1940, that the conditions were excellent as far as hygiene and facilities were concerned.²⁰

The tolerance shown by the Australian authorities and the considerable degree of personal freedom enjoyed by the internees soon brought about a revival of political activities within the camps. They were allowed to elect a camp leader, whose duties included the administration of the camp library, canteen and kitchen, and the distribution of mail. It was expected of him to be able to influence the conduct of the internees under his control and, in general, to be responsible for their behaviour. Since the majority of the internees were Fascists, the elected camp leader was invariably a prominent Fascist. Under his control, the internees continued with their Fascist rituals, celebrations and political rallies. Even sporting activities and art and crafts exhibitions were intended to have Fascist significance; diplomas distributed to the internees still bore the Fascist coat of arms and were dated according to the Fascist calendar, Fascist Italians, once interned, were confirmed in their belief in the final victory of the Axis and became boisterous to the point that they were quarrelling among themselves not only in order to assert their authority over each other, but also on who would govern what state of Australia once the Nazi-Fascist armies had invaded this country.21 Between 1940 and 1943 security service officers reported increasing manifestations of sympathy for Fascism and for Nazism amongst Italians in the camps, 22 and by 1945 the Australian authorities had realised that the influence of the camp leaders over the internees had been instrumental in kindling the latter's faith in these ideologies. An inquiry carried out by the Minister for Information discovered that: 'the influence exercised by camp leaders and their supporters over other internees operate[d] to cause many internees of no firm political belief to continue their adherence to our enemies', and that 'the camp leaders have not shrunk even from the use of physical violence if that be necessary to maintain their dominance'.²³ The Director-General of Security confirmed the accuracy of this finding in April 1945.²⁴

What made the continuation of Fascist practices in internment camps dangerous was the fact that Italians of Fascist as well as anti-Fascist opinions had been interned in the same camps. It was inevitable that their living close together would cause friction and incitement to violence. There is conclusive documentary evidence to the effect that anti-Fascist Italians were harassed, provoked and assaulted, and that the strong-arm tactics of the Fascist element created an atmosphere of tension and terror among internees who were not active supporters of either faction.²⁵ At the internment camp at Hay, where evidence of intimidation and threats against anti-Fascists had been obtained by the army and where in November 1940 an anti-Fascist Italian had been assaulted.26 the situation was so serious that the camp commandant recommended to the military board that the two factions housed in this 'difficult compound' be permanently separated by building a barbed wire fence across the camp. The army agreed to this proposal in February 1941.27 Yet the separation of internees at Hay remained an isolated instance and, in other camps, Fascist and anti-Fascist internees lived together until the beginning of 1943. Besides, the political implications of keeping together people so hostile to each other as well as the gravity of the situation on a human level were not fully realised until the Fantin case.

On 16 November 1942, an Italian Anarchist, Francesco Fantin, was killed at the South Australian internment camp No. 14A at Loveday by a Fascist internee, Giovanni Casotti. The murder arose from a fight between the two, after Italian anti-Fascists and Jews of camp 14D had, a few days earlier, subscribed to a list collecting money in aid of Russia. When, shortly before, news of the collection had reached camp 14A, the Fascist clique running the camp was enraged by the audacity shown by the anti-Fascists. A slogan was immediately coined: 'Kill the Communists, kill the bastards who gave money for Russia', 28 and that same night some Fascists were overheard saying that they had to kill the

actively anti-Fascist internees.²⁹ An atmosphere of violence against the opponents of Fascism had been reigning at the Loveday camps for some time; Fantin had already been physically attacked twice, on 15 August, when someone tried to strangle him, and on 7 November,³⁰ and other anti-Fascists had suffered the same fate at the hands of Fascist Italians armed with sticks and razor blades.³¹ When, at the beginning of November 1942, 496 hard-line Fascists were transferred from Western Australian camps to Loveday, the tension reached a breaking point. The security service later ascertained that 'each side, anti-Fascist and Fascist, wishe[d] to be rid of the other' and that 'Fantin's death was the culmination of the unequal struggle of anti-Fascists against Fascists in the compound'.³²

The circumstances of Fantin's death are rather obscure. Casotti claimed that Fantin insulted him and that he pushed him in anger against a water tap; Fantin fell and hit his head against the wooden upright supporting the water pipe and the tap. Contrary to this account, some witnesses to the incident stated that Casotti struck his victim on the head with a piece of wood and that when Fantin fell he kicked him.33 It is important to determine the exact cause of Fantin's death because it throws light on the conduct of the internee Fascists and of the military authorities following the incident. When Fantin was brought unconscious to his hut. Dr Piscitelli, who also was the camp leader and a staunch Fascist, tried to hide the murder by saying that the heat caused Fantin to faint, although minutes before he heard Casotti saying 'I have just finished that f...b... Venetian' and had told him to keep quiet. He also tried later on to prevent the anti-Fascist friends of Fantin from giving evidence at the inquest held by the army only ten days after the event.³⁴ Indeed, Dr Piscitelli concealed from the Australian authorities the name of the author of the murderous action until Casotti came forward after the result of Fantin's autopsy was known and pleaded guilty of having pushed Fantin against the tap thus causing his accidental death.35 Instead, he was charged with murder.

Soon the news of Fantin's death reached his Italian and Australian friends outside the camp. Immediately representations against Fantin's murder and his previous treatment in the internment camp were made to the government by the trade unions, Italian anti-Fascists, and political parties as well as by religious and civil liberty organisations. These protests also raised the questions why the government kept in internment people of anti-Fascist opinions, and why these people were held in camps together with Fascist internees. Fantin's murder put in doubt the capacity of the army to maintain order in the camps and to protect the lives of people who did not share the same political opinion as the majority of interned Italians. The security service admitted that the charge of murder, which could be carried in this case, was bound not only to embarass the government because it cast serious doubts on the efficiency of its administration of the detention regulations, but also it 'might involve difficult questions for the Minister to answer' and 'might produce protests and further complicate matters'. 36 Consequently, although the accused's actions strongly pointed to murder, it was decided to try Casotti for manslaughter. The changing of the charge was justified 'on account of the majority of the witnesses being alien'. 37 It is not clear whether this flimsy excuse implied that the killing of a foreigner was a less serious crime than the murder of a British subject or that a statement under oath by an alien could not be relied upon. Giovanni Casotti was tried on 19 March 1943, found guilty and sentenced to two years' hard labour. Mr Justice Richards in passing sentence did not leave any doubt that Fantin had been struck intentionally by the accused, who delivered a very violent blow that killed the Anarchist. Mr Justice Richards told Casotti that he might consider himself very fortunate in not receiving a much heavier sentence, since he had been prosecuted for manslaughter 'for reasons which need not be stated'.38

The conditions of terror in the camps did not change after Fantin's murder. At Loveday in particular, Dr Piscitelli and those whom the security service euphemistically called his 'confidential friends' (that is his Fascist cronies who formed the political junta in that camp), continued their persecution of anti-Fascist internees. On 18 January 1943, the camp commandant was authorised to transfer to a camp in another state four internees who wished to give evidence on Fantin's

death. The transfer was recommended by the security service 'in order to avoid physical risk from attack by other internees'.40 In December 1942 a German national interned at camp 14D at Loveday complained to the Swiss consul, who protected German interests in Australia, that Italians and Germans loyal to their governments were compelled to share the camp with 'a devilish mixture of elements hostile and traitorous ... a group of Communists, Jews, half-Jews and others . . . '. This arrangement was undoubtedly intolerable to these loyal subjects and the Australian authorities, according to him, bore the responsibility of allowing 'this continual provocation in this camp', which brought about 'unbearable tension the result of which may soon be serious'. Indeed, continued the author of this letter, 'unless the authorities act promptly and separate us from ... similar provocators there will be hell let loose here very soon'.41 That anti-Fascist internees were persecuted was well known to the security service from the many references made by apprehensive internees in their letters to their friends and relatives. Moreover, the service admitted that they were unable to prevent further killings and adopted the ad hoc policy of releasing the active anti-Fascists 'in case the ardent Fascists decided to attack [them] also'.42

Thus Fantin's murder and the public outcry which followed had the effect of speeding up the release from internment of Italian anti-Fascists. At the end of 1942 at least fifty of them were still interned, 43 but their situation improved considerably with the appointment of Brigadier W.B. Simpson as Director-General of Security. Not only did he feel disturbed by Fantin's death, in view of the fact that he had personally investigated the case and had set the date for the release of Fantin the week following his murder, but also he considered it essential to the war effort and to the improvement of the segregation position in the camps that all Italians 'who are known to be anti-Fascist or even not violently Fascist, should be released' and usefully employed in agriculture or industry.44 Although the army was 'doing its best to segregate the sheep from the goats',45 that is, to separate Italian Fascists from the anti-Fascists, it seems that the army and the security service had different opinions on their release. The Australian Chief of the General Staff maintained the view that the loyalty of Italian anti-Fascists to the British and Allied cause was questionable on account of 'the intensity of their patriotism for the country of their origin', so that even if their sincerity was beyond any possible doubt, the army believed that they were 'rightly held in internment'. 46 The security service showed more flexibility on the issue and in January 1943 made plans for the release of 1.500 to 2.000 Italian internees during the next three months.⁴⁷ This measure undoubtedly eased the segregation problems in the camps and made available to the war effort considerable labour resources at a time when manpower was scarce and when Australia, like the United States, Great Britain, Germany and Japan, was gearing its economy to its maximum war potential. Yet disturbances in the camps were by no means quashed after the Fantin case; in January 1943 the Deputy Director of Security for Queensland recommended the segregation of Fascists from anti-Fascists and Communists at the Cowra camp to prevent violence,48 and in September 1944 there was bloodshed at the Hay internment camp, where the warring factions gave vent to their smouldering hatred.49 The problem of Fascist influence in internment camps was still pressing in 1945 when the Minister for Information, Arthur A. Calwell, suggested that an inquiry should be held on 'why the dual systems of Nazism and Fascism were ever allowed to develop in our Australian internment camps'.50

Italian anti-Fascists were not the only ones to suffer for their beliefs from the hands of their co-nationals; many Jews, who had migrated to Australia after the racial laws had been enacted in Italy in 1938 and who were stupidly interned together with the Fascists, were easy victims of the latter's prejudice and racial hatred. Only in September 1942 did the army acknowledge the problem and put the Jewish internees in a separate camp.⁵¹

Italians interned for the whole period of the war remained firm in their allegiance to Fascism, although the reason for their attachment sounded more and more like a justification. For instance, when news of Italy's capitulation reached No. 9 internment camp at Loveday, the compound observed a day of mourning and 'had never been seen so intensely quiet before'.

With the exception of the Fascist leaders who looked 'very sick' and the diehards who plastered the blackboard of the school with signs 'VV IL DUCE' 'VV IL FASCISMO', the general attitude was that Italians had chosen Fascism as a lesser evil than Communism.⁵² Yet the Italian political and military catastrophe did not convert many, if any at all, Fascist internees to active anti-Fascism. The vast majority of them, although still Fascist in sympathy, were loath to be caught again in any form of political activity and seemed to be mainly preoccupied with re-establishing themselves and adjusting their private affairs as soon as they were released from internment.

A second and by far the largest group of Italians held in captivity in Australia were the prisoners-of-war captured mainly in the threatres of operations of North and East Africa and sent to Australian POW camps. Living conditions and accommodation in the camps were excellent, and left a most favourable impression on the International Red Cross delegate, Morel, who visited them quite frequently. By September 1943 there were 7,100 Italian POWs in Australia,53 but their number swelled in June 1944 to 14.00054 and to 16,780 in March 1945.55 In December 1945 the army was holding in its custody 17,131 Italian POWs.⁵⁶ They were welcomed by the Australian government who insistently asked the British War Office to send more of them to this country to assist in the production of vital foodstuffs.⁵⁷ From 2 June 1943, Italian POWs were employed without guards in groups of up to three on individual farms and in parties of fifty to 200 in rural industry.⁵⁸ By June 1944 over 12,000 were employed unguarded in rural work of great importance to Australian food production⁵⁹ and their number reached a maximum of 15,000 in March 1945.60 On the whole, they behaved admirably, were well received by the Australian families for whom they worked and never represented a security risk. The army and the security service were anxious to avoid any fraternising between POWs and civilians, and for this reason did not allot POWs to farmers of Italian origin.61 Farmers and civilians who were alleged to show friendship towards POWs were investigated and if the claims were proven correct they were denied the use of POW labour in future.62

Notwithstanding the penalties involved, Italian POWs in some cases 'were being treated as members of the family' by Australian farmers.⁶³

POWs released from the camps for rural work did not include active Fascists, agitators or otherwise troublesome types, 64 who were denied this opportunity. The POW camps remained the breeding ground for Fascist propaganda. The enforced idleness and the isolation of the camps, both physical and intellectual, favoured not only the development of a climate of mental stagnation and of hopeless clinging to an outdated interpretation of world events, but also to instances of moral degradation. In particular, the Italian officers confined at the Myrtleford POW camp were suffering tremendously from these conditions and some of them fell victims 'to neuraesthenia and to abnormal sexual relations'.65 It is not surprising therefore that Italian POWs who still believed in Fascism were badly shocked by the news of Mussolini's downfall.66 Yet for many prisoners-of-war, as for many internees, Fascism was a mental habit more than an ideology, and they could not shake it off even when confronted with its historical bankruptcy. Evidence of Fascist activities in POW camps throughout 1944 and the first part of 1945 prompted the Australian army to issue directives in May 1945 to all camp commandants instructing them to eliminate Fascist ideology and practices in the camps. All Fascist salutes were forbidden, Fascist signs, emblems and literature were to be seized, and the sale of the anti-Fascist newspaper Il Risveglio was encouraged. By this the army hoped that the Fascist diehards would lose their influence in the camps and that, if steady pressure were applied: 'to indicate that continued adherence to the Nazi and Fascist doctrines will merely lead the persons concerned into positions of great difficulty for themselves, a change-over in the outlook of the majority should be inevitable'.67 The army directives warned also that 'at a later stage action will be taken in respect of intransigent minorities'.

The threat of unspecified action against the Fascist extremists did not materialise because by May 1945 the war against Italy and Germany was over and the problem of repatriating all Italian POWs arose. The Australian

government had previously decided to continue the employment of Italian prisoners on rural work until they had to be repatriated or until the need for their labour no longer existed, but refused to contemplate their retention as civilian labourers after the war.⁶⁸ The first ship with 718 prisoners-of-war left for Italy on 3 August 1945,⁶⁹ and the repatriation of all Italian POWs was completed in various stages by January 1947, as the availability of shipping permitted.⁷⁰

Not all Italian POWs returned home; some 130 died in Australia during their captivity and are buried at Murchison, Victoria.

The third large group of Italians in Australia were the migrants who were not interned during the war and who continued to live and to work amongst the Australians. Their situation was undoubtedly the hardest of the three groups. While the position of the civilian internees and of the prisoners-of-war had been clearly determined and, rightly or wrongly, they were considered as positive security risks, the Italians at large were always under suspicion of being a potential threat to national security and were attacked by the most irrational and jingoistic section of Australian public opinion, and not only verbally. Many of them lost their jobs in June 1940 as a result of Italy's entering the war.71 The government was so concerned to prevent a repetition of the situation which had arisen at the outbreak of World War I (when job discrimination against enemy aliens had been so ferocious that 'it was found necessary to intern these people to save them from starvation'),72 that in 1939 it had already taken steps to avoid a similar situation and had accepted financial responsibility for any person to whom the states could not provide relief.73 The security service backed this policy, pointing out that unemployed migrants were 'much more liable to be affected by hostile and subversive influences . . . in addition to becoming a burden on the State'.74

The uneasiness created by the fact that so many Italians were free reached alarming proportions in 1942, when the danger of a Japanese invasion was really serious. In February the Labor Premier of New South Wales, McKell, showing a remarkable lack of humanity, recommended the uprooting of 9,000 Italians living in the coastal areas of the state and their

resettlement in inland areas, but this suggestion was turned down by the Director-General of Security.75 Even some security officers were caught in this climate of fear and lost their objectivity; one of them expressed the opinion that the Italian community as a whole could not be regarded 'as other than a definite danger to the security of Australia',76 while another pointed out that all enemy aliens ought always to be distrusted.77 At times the concern for Italian activities in Australia reached absurd and irrational levels when people attributed to them mysterious conspiratorial designs. This attitude is typically illustrated in a report by a police inspector from Queenstown, Tasmania, who stated that the local Italians were: 'alright, but one has to realise the activities of the fifth column, consequently none can be regarded as really reliable, though none of the Italians here appear to be pleased with the idea of Italy entering the War'. 78 Also, purchases of real estate effected by Italians during the months prior to the outbreak of hostilities were believed by the New South Wales Premier to be so suspect 'as to give the idea that they formed part of a system'.79

The presence of enemy aliens not interned and allowed to carry on with their work or their business contributed to fanning ill-feeling amongst the less educated Australians who throughout 1942 persistently and indiscriminately accused Italians on the South Coast of New South Wales of being 'a fifth column and a menace', and of committing 'disloyal and subversive actions' such as 'going out to sea in their boats to celebrate an Axis victory every time the news came thro'.80 However, some people rightly saw that the national interests were better served by freeing Italians and allowing them to work in the fields, in the factories, by using their skills and their manpower to the benefit of the war effort. Those concerned with winning the war and not with jingoistic histrionics agreed that the Italians, with the exception of a few hundred already interned, could not be considered a potential threat but instead were simple people, attached primarily to their family, their land and their peasant traditions. The situation in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area of New South Wales is perhaps typical of most country communities with a sizable Italian minority; there, officers of the Department of the Interior reported:

the Italians are quiet and well behaved and going about their work in a normal way. All opinions from officials, business men, and block holders were unanimous that the Italian element is not likely to cause any trouble... The only potential danger under present circumstances is that some hot heads amongst the Australians may endeavour to take direct action against Italians....⁸¹

The Commonwealth government soon realised that the policy of allowing innocent Italians to return to their occupations was not only an act of justice as well as of economic utility, but also a necessity which in many instances offered no other alternative. For instance, in 1940 the internment of many Italian farmers in Western Australia threatened total ruin for the potato crop of that state. Immediately the federal government was inundated with pleas for their release coming from people who otherwise would not have bothered to speak on their behalf.82 Canberra not only recognised that it was essential, in the general interests of security, to let Italians carry on with their normal business of producing food,83 but was also concerned to keep them informed on current events in their own language, and to this purpose allowed the previously pro-Fascist Brisbane newspaper L'Italiano to continue publishing under a strict censorship well after the outbreak of the war.84

The need of being informed, as well as of informing other people, was felt by many Italians. To them this meant being involved in politics again. The war years and the understandable hostility by Australians towards Italians did not deter some of the latter who were free from becoming politically active. Between 1940 and 1945 the same issues which divided the Italian community in the pre-war years were still confronting and dividing it, and, in most instances, even the people involved were the same ones who figured prominently in community affairs during the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, the realities of the international situation compelled the groups and the people competing to achieve political supremacy within the Italian community to operate under substantially different political conditions. The anti-Fascists, now rallying around the *Italia Libera* Movement, had

to face the situation - new to them - of enjoying the Australian government's recognition and support for their aims and of being in a position to speak authoritatively on behalf of the Italian community because their twenty-year-old struggle against Fascism was now the main Allied war aim as well as the official policy of the new Italian government of the south. Cast in this role much to their surprise and not on their own merit, they had to adjust to it after having spent a lifetime in the political wilderness. The old supporters of Fascism, on the other hand, without the support of the Fascist consuls and without the network of clubs and associations through which Fascism was promoted before the war, were confronted with the danger of being pushed in their turn into a position of social as well as political isolation. They soon realised that, in order to maintain their position of privilege which was threatened by the political influence acquired recently by the Italia Libera Movement, they had to discredit the anti-Fascist policies and to deny them the opportunity of influencing the majority of Italian migrants.

This operation had a chance of success only if two conditions could be satisfied: that an ideology alternative to Fascism be elaborated, which would be acceptable to the majority of Italians, would not antagonise the Australian government and would thus create a climate favourable to the defence of their interests; second, that they should win enough political backing to balance and to neutralise the support afforded to Italia Libera by the federal government. The strategy adopted was based on the indisputable truth that most Italians were showing little interest in politics as well as on the claim that they were truly democratic at heart, which obviously was not easily verifiable. While this line aimed at influencing positively Australian public opinion, Italian migrants were approached in a different way. The method used with them was to rely heavily on the old but by no means ineffective repertoire of nationalist and conservative propaganda. They were told that in those days of national disaster they had the duty to remaining united and that whoever was promoting policies of division was an anti-national element. It was perfectly useless, stressed the advocates of this line, to criticise Fascism, Mussolini, Badoglio and the King, when Italians in Australia did not fully understand the situation. The best attitude one could take was not to be involved in politics, not to take a stand — with the exception, it goes without saying, of the masterminds of this policy. 'We do not know the facts and personally have neither declared war nor signed the armistice. Let history pass its judgement on this issue', wrote one of them. ⁸⁵

Naturally, the promotion of what was undoubtedly another instance of the classical Italian game of political *trasformismo* depended largely on success in gaining the support of an Australian institution which could fill the role played by the Italian consuls before the war, so successful with Italian migrants, and which was already exerting considerable influence in Australian public life.

No institution could respond better to the expectations of the old supporters of Fascism than the Catholic Church in Australia. Indeed, ever since the 1920s the Catholic hierarchy had shown its intention of shielding the migrants from the doctrines of political secularism and of Communism, mainly through the activities of its Italian-born clergy. After the outbreak of the war, the old supporters of Fascism found a natural and complacent ally in those priests still free to exercise their ministry. It can be argued that, while in effect the Church's support was essential to the former in the pursuit of their interests, their own involvement as well was instrumental to the Church's plan of creating a sizable conservative Italian public opinion which could thwart the political efforts of the anti-Fascists. The consequences of this alliance would become manifest after World War II when its leaders exercised a hegemonic authority over the second wave of Italian immigrants to this country.

The clerical spokesman of this policy was the Jesuit Father Ugo Modotti. He arrived in Melbourne at the end of August 1938 after Archbishop Mannix had repeatedly pressed the Vatican for a successor to Father De Francesco, also a Jesuit, who had been working in Melbourne for fourteen years before his return to Italy in 1933. From the outset Modotti acted under Mannix's direct supervision and authority. Modotti believed that his religious task was to stop Italians from becoming atheist and Communist, and to this purpose he began publishing in December 1938 a monthly bulletin, L'Angelo della Famiglia, which was distributed mainly in Melbourne. Modotti also contributed to publications that declared openly their Fascist sympathies. In October

1939 he published the article 'World without Soul' in the *Vade Mecum*, in which he condemned modern science, capitalism, Socialism, materialism and even the ideals of the French Revolution but did not hesitate in stating that 'history — impartial judge — will say in future how farsighted and wise was Benito Mussolini's domestic policy'. In 1939 Mannix and Modotti opened in Melbourne schools of Italian language for Italian children, to 'protect them from the insidious objectives of the Communists', that is, to draw them away from the school that the Italian anti-Fascists, whom Modotti, following the Fascist custom, indiscriminately called Communists, planned to open at Carlton.

When Italy entered the war, Modotti was charged by the Commonwealth Investigation Branch with being a Fascist and arrested. He was released after two hours thanks to Archbishop Mannix's personal intervention and was put on parole. Nevertheless his movements and his activities were watched closely by the security service, which suspected him of espionage, spreading Fascist propaganda and even of harbouring Italian POW escapees.90 In May 1941 Modotti complained to the Apostolic Delegate that Italian anti-Fascists 'under the pretence of false patriotism' were hindering his work 'as a priest and as an Italian . . . in a foreign land'. 91 His work, inter alia, consisted of sponsoring the release of the Fascist leaders who were interned, in particular that of Mario Speirani, F. M. Bianchi and F. Valente. On the other hand, there is no evidence that he ever made representations to the government in favour of an anti-Fascist. When the Italia Libera Movement was formed at the end of 1942, Modotti and his political friends saw in it 'another manifestation of the machinations of principalities and powers and another reason for the consolidation of [their] work'. 92 To contain the influence of the anti-Fascists, Archbishop Mannix in September 1943 launched an Appeal for Italian Relief. Its committee members were Father Modotti, Mons. P. Lvons, Vicar-General of the Melbourne archdiocese, B. A. Santamaria and G. Vaccari.93 The appeal aimed at winning the allegiance of Italians through the Trojan horse of welfare work and religious assistance. and by December 1943 the results were so encouraging that a friend of Modotti, impressed by the committee's work, in particular Vaccari's, commented: 'no wonder Our Lord chose you blokes to man his principal terrestrial executive'.94

Indeed, Modotti and his associates embarked on their struggle against the anti-Fascists as if they were the holders of a supernatural mandate and showed intolerance towards anyone who opposed them or was mildly critical of their position. In December 1945 Modotti even accused the Apostolic Delegate of sympathising with the Communists and of affording his protection to the editors of Il Risveglio. 95 Late in 1943 and at the beginning of 1944 the main channel of propaganda used by the Modotti group was to insert in the monthly magazine of the west Melbourne parish, Stella Maris, a section in Italian called L'Angelo della Famiglia, but soon they felt the need to revive the parochial bulletin of the same name published in 1938-40, and in August 1944 its first number again appeared as a monthly magazine. Ten thousand copies were printed and distributed to Italian civilians and to POWs in the camps. 96 Nevertheless, even this publication was considered inadequate to counter Il Risveglio and the increasing amount of anti-Fascist literature circulated by the Italia Libera Movement. In April 1945 the Apostolic Delegate asked Modotti to approach B. A. Santamaria to get him to apply as soon as possible for permission to edit a new weekly paper for the Italian community, and ordered that the Delegate's name should not be mentioned in reference to the paper since he did 'not want it known that priests have anything to do with it'.97 The authorities, according to the Apostolic Delegate, were sympathetic to the project because they realised the need to combat Communism. Yet the Victorian bishops and the Catholic Action forbade Santamaria to have anything to do with the proposed weekly and the matter was taken up by a member of the Archbishop's Committee, G. Briglia, who in April submitted the application. The Comptroller-General of Trade and Customs refused to issue a permit to publish on the grounds that there was not enough newsprint available.98 This ruling, based on technical and not political reasons, paved the way for the appearance of the conservative Italian press of the post-war years.

By mid-1945 World War II was over and Modotti, having

carried out his 'mission' in Australia, returned to Italy at the

end of that year. Italian internees were released shortly after and many of them who had been imprisoned because of their Fascist ideas returned to their previous positions of influence and power within the Italian community. The ensuing Cold War sped up this process of restoration.

Notwithstanding the economic hardships, the hostility of some Australians, their internment and their status of enemy aliens, the Italians in Australia came out of the war years virtually unscathed, both in social and political terms. The bitter and fratricidal civil war which tore Northern Italy apart in 1943-5 did not cause any irreparable division among Italians in this country and they were able to become again an integral part of the society in which they lived. On the whole, the Australian government and all organisations concerned with the handling of Italians during the war years behaved towards them in a manner which gives credit to their tolerance and sense of fair play, once they were able to understand the political divisions besetting the migrants. This fact was admitted by the representative of the new Italian government in London, Count Carandini, who stated that 'the Italians in Australia have been extremely well treated'.99

By 1945 Fascism was politically finished but its legacy continued to influence the behaviour of many migrants who for twenty years had been accustomed to giving unquestioned obedience to the representatives of the regime. After 1945, unable to free themselves from this state of intellectual servitude, they depended upon the political guidance of their 'new' community leaders, who in many instances were the same old Fascists who continued in their habit of counselling the migrants to mind their own business, to avoid being involved in political activities and taking part in what is the essential democratic process of questioning things before accepting them.

For Italians in Australia, after the fall of Fascism, things changed to remain just the same as before.

Notes

1 See Mario Luciolli, Palazzo Chigi: anni roventi, Milano, 1976, p. 82.

- 2 AA, MP729/6, item 22/401/211, Army to External Affairs, 12 April 1940.
- 3 AA, CRS A1608, item A 19/1/1 pt I, SA Premier to Prime Minister, 8 April 1943.
- 4 Ibid., NSW Premier to Prime Minister, 11 Sept. 1940.
- 5 Ibid., Victorian Premier to Prime Minister, 10 Nov. 1939.
- 6 AA, CRS A376, item T189, list No. 189.
- 7 AA, MP729/6, item 22/401/76, Army 7 MD, to Military Board, 2 May 1940.
- 8 AA, 13.P242, item Q30565, Italians, Master File, p. 9, Report by CIB officer on Italian organisations, undated.
- 9 AA, MP729/6, item 63/401/111, Defence to consul-general of Japan, 24 Sept. 1940.
- 10 AÅ, CRS A1608, item 441/1/4 pt II, Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister's Dept, 2 June 1940.
- 11 Ibid., Trade and Customs to Prime Minister's Dept, 14 June 1940.
- 12 AA, MP729/6, item 63/401/119, Western Command to Military Board, 29 Aug. 1940.
- 13 AA, CRS A432, item 40/335, Crown Solicitor to Attorney-General's Dept, 28 Oct. 1940.
- 14 AA, MP729/6, item 63/401/119, Army to Western Command, 15 Aug. 1940. The Western Australian internees included 690 Italians working in the goldfields area, interned because 'it was feared that riots would eventuate and mining property be destroyed, thus seriously affecting not only the morale of the people, but also the general war effort'!; 125 from the Geraldton area, where the army had its second largest oil reserves in Western Australia, and eighty-three from the South Western timber areas, interned because 'of the likelihood of strikes taking place unless the Italians are interned' (ibid.) Western Command to Military Board, 29 Aug. 1940).
- 15 Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, Canberra, 1965, p. 594. At this time all Italians in Queensland were considered 'as being potentially very dangerous to the security of Australia in the event of a Japanese invasion or attack' (AA, CRS A1608, item 319/1/4, Trade and Customs to Prime Minister's Dept, 16 March 1942).
- 16 Sydney Morning Herald, 30 Nov. 1944.
- 17 Morel was appointed delegate in February 1941. See AA, CRS A989, item 40/4 pt I, External Affairs to G. Morel, 13 Feb. 1941.
- 18 AA, CRS A1066, item IC45/32/10, Morel to IRC, 21 March 1945.
- 19 The Jesuit Archives, Hawthorn, Victoria. The Modotti Papers (hereafter JAMP), A. Owens to Modotti, 3 Dec. 1941. The Military chaplain at Tatura assured Modotti that he 'must not think for a moment that they are being harshly treated. Under international law, prisoners-of-war have certain rights that have to be respected. In these camps however, the authorities do not

limit themselves to doing only what they are bound to do. The prisoners are granted many privileges, and I often see instances of how the Camp Commandants and others go out of their way to do something to help them, in cases where there is certainly no obligation on them to do so'.

20 Luciolli, Palazzo Chigi, p. 84.

- 21 Giuseppe Zammarchi, interview, 14 March 1974. See also AA, MP508/1, item 255/714/241, Army Minute Paper, 11 Dec. 1940, which quotes the following extract from a letter written by an internee at Hay: 'I am in the midst of a noisy howling mob of Fascists. They quarrel bitterly among themselves, the Fascists of N.S.W. against those from Victoria and Queensland, to decide who is going to control the internal affairs of the camp...'.
- 22 'There are quite a few Italians in the camp who are very pro-German' (from the Security Service Report on an interview with an internee at the Loveday camp on 5 November 1943, in AA, AP538/1, item SA20499).
- 23 AA, CRS A373, item 10913, Minister for Information to Attorney-General 7 March 1945.
- 24 'Though the results of the War had done much to destroy Fascist beliefs, the Party spirit had been kept alive in internment camps by leaders' (AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/11, Director-General of Security to External Affairs, 3 April 1945).
- An anti-Fascist, writing to a friend on 18 November, 1942 from Loveday, informed him that 'if there would not have been the deterrent and the fear of the [Australian] Military Command, I am certain that [the Fascists] before now would have done us' (Cristofaro Papers, V. Manassero to Cristofaro, 18 Nov. 1942). Another Loveday anti-Fascist conveyed to a friend the atmosphere of terror reigning in the camp when he asked him to get him out of there because 'especially in these days here we are in a terrible situation, we are very few, and you understand the reason; I hope that you will be able to do something for me soon' (Cristofaro Papers, G. Sceresini to Cristofaro, 22 Nov. 1942). Yet another Loveday internee wrote to his sister-in-law on 22 December 1942 that 'I do not wish to remain among certain Italians ... I am afraid among these people' (AA, CRS A373, item 10913, Intelligence Report No. 188). Another one, writing to his wife in January 1943 said that 'the atmosphere here is a bit tense ... I keep out of all political trouble but the tension between 100 per cent Communists and Fascists is growing ... From one of the Italian mess-huts sounds the Fascist hymn just now sounds the Fascist salute. I can see it come there is trouble in the air' (ibid.).
- 26 AA, MP508/1, item 255/714/241, Eastern Command Intelligence Report No. 39, 6-13 Dec. 1940. Also Zammarchi, interview.
- 27 AA, MP508/1, item 255/714/241, Eastern Command to Military Board, 31 Jan. 1941; Military Board to Eastern Command, 25 Feb. 1941.

- 28 Advertiser, 22 Jan. 1943; Sunday Telegraph, 24 Jan. 1943.
- 29 AA, CRS A373, item 3744, SA Intelligence Report attached to: Security Service, Qld to Security Service, Canberra, 16 Jan. 1943.
- 30 Ibid., item 10913, SA Intelligence Report No. 191, 2 Feb. 1943.
- 31 Ibid., item 3744, G. Bossone's statement on the attack suffered by him, undated.
- 32 Ibid., SA Intelligence Report attached to: Security Service, Qld to Security Service, Canberra, 16 Jan. 1943.
- 33 Ibid., 'What goes on in Internment Camps'.
- 34 Ibid. Also, ibid., Director-General of Security to Security Service Brisbane, 16 Dec. 1942.
- 35 Ibid., SA Intelligence Report for week ending 20 Nov. 1942.
- 36 AA, CRS A373, item 10913, Security Service Adelaide to Security Service Canberra, 6 Feb. 1943.
- 37 Ibid., Security Service Adelaide to Brigadier W. B. Simpson, Canberra, 2 March 1943.
- 38 Ibid., Text of Sentence passed by Mr Justice Richards, R. v Giovanni Casotti, 19 March 1943.
- 39 Ibid., item 3744, SA Security Service Report for week ending 20 Nov. 1942.
- 40 Ibid., Security Service, Confidential Note on Death of internee Francesco Fantin at Loveday, 18 Jan. 1943.
- 41 Ibid., SA Intelligence Report No. 183, 8 Dec. 1942.
- 42 Ibid., Director-General of Security to Security Service Brisbane, 16 Dec. 1942.
- 43 Ibid., List of anti-Fascist Italians interned, 18 Jan. 1943.
- 44 Ibid., Director-General of Security to Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia, 1 Jan. 1943.
- 45 Ibid., Director-General of Security to Attorney-General, 8 Jan. 1943.
- 46 Ibid., Army to Director-General of Security, 9 Jan. 1943, ref. 910.
- 47 Ibid., Army to Director-General of Security, 9 Jan. 1943, ref. 912.
- 48 Ibid., Security Service Brisbane to Director-General of Security, 2 Jan. 1943.
- 49 Ibid., item 10913, Minister for Labour and National Service to Director-General of Security, 12 Sept. 1944.
- 50 Ibid., Minister for Information to Attorney-General, 7 March 1945.
- 51 Ibid., item 3744, Army to Rev. C. V. Pilcher, Jan. 1943.
- 52 AA, AP613 Series 2, item 90/1/237, Intelligence Report, Loveday camp, 10 Sept. 1943. The majority stated that 'they were Fascists by compulsion rather than design, and were glad the Regime had ended' (AA, AP613 Series 2, item 130/1/37, Army SA to Army Headquarters, 12 June 1945). The veracity of both statements, in particular the second one, is very doubtful,

because by this time most POWs, even the less articulate ones, had sensed the momentous changes taking place in Italy and were seeking to adapt themselves to the new political reality by claiming to have always felt an inward distaste for the regime, a sentiment which obviously could not be substantiated.

53 AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/34, Cablegram, High Commissioner's Office, London, to Prime Minister's Dept. 10 Sept. 1943.

Ibid., item 925/1/111, Teleprinter, External Affairs to Army, 5 54

- June 1944. CRS 55 AA. A1066. item E/45/19/11, External Affairs Memorandum, Appointment of an Italian Agent, 27 March 1945.
- Ibid., item IC45/32/6/25, Cablegram, External Affairs to High 56 Commissioner's Office, London, 3 Dec. 1945.
- 57 AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/34, Cablegram, External Affairs to High Commissioner's Office, London, 22 Oct. 1943.
- 58 Ibid., item 925/1/87, Army to External Affairs, 22 July 1943.
- 59 Ibid., item 925/1/111, Cablegram, External Affairs to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, 7 June 1944.
- 60 AA, CRS A376, item T321, Security Service Canberra to all Branches, 15 March 1945.
- AA, CRS A373, item 11638 pt I, Director-General of Security to 61 the Director-General of Manpower, 7 Feb. 1944.
- 62 Ibid., Survey of POW Employment Scheme in Shepparton District. 26 Jan. 1944.
- 63 AA, CRS A376, item T321, Security Service Launceston to Security Service Hobart, 22 March 1944.
- CRS A989, item 925/1/87, Army, Procedure for Employment of POWs without guards, p. 3.
- 65 Ibid., item 925/1/30 pt 3, G. Morel, Report on the visit made to the Italian Prisoners of War camps at Myrtleford, Victoria, 17 July 1943.
- On this, see AA, CRS A373, item 6811, 'Reaction to Overthrow of Fascism in Italy and Surrender of Italy', 1943-44.
- AA, AP613 Series 2, item 130/1/37, Army Headquarters, 4th 67 MD to POWs camps, 25 May 1945. On Fascist influence in POW camps, see AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/69, Army to External Affairs, 3 Dec. 1943.
- AA, CRS A989, item 925/1/87, Cablegram, External Affairs to 68 the High Commissioner's Office, London, 6 Nov. 1944.
- 69 AA, CRS A1066, item IC45/7/25, External Affairs to Mrs E. Morel, 6 Nov. 1945.
- Ibid., item IC45/32/6/25, External Affairs to the High 70 Commissioner's Office, London, 3 Dec. 1945.
- 71 On this, see AA, CRS A1608, item A19/1/3, Prime Minister's Dept to Mr D. Filipuzzi, 19 June 1940; Attorney-General's Dept to CIB Canberra, 20 Aug. 1940. Also Il Risveglio, 13 Nov. 1946 and 22 Jan. 1947.

- 72 Ibid., Defence to Prime Minister's Dept, 30 Oct. 1939.
- 73 Ibid., Treasury to Prime Minister's Dept. 23 Nov. 1939.
- 74 Ibid., item D19/1/1, Director of Military Intelligence to NEWS Commands, undated.
- 75 Ibid., item A19/1/3, NSW Premier to Prime Minister, 23 Feb. 1942; Director-General of Security to Army, 16 July 1942.
- 76 AA AP719/3, item SA22082, Security Service Sydney to Security Service Adelaide, 9 Feb. 1942.
- 77 AA, CRS A376, item T311, Deputy Director of Security, Tasmania, to Director-General of Security, 9 Dec. 1942.
- 78 Ibid., item T189, Inspector T. A. Canning to Commissioner of Police, Hobart, 3 June 1940.
- 79 AA, CRS A1608, item D19/1/2 pt I, NSW Premier to Prime Minister, 10 July 1940.
- 80 Ibid., item W19/1/1 pt I, R. N. Beale MLA to Prime Minister, 21 March 1942.
- 81 AA, CRS A433, item 43/2/201, Report by officers of the Department of the Interior, 12 July 1940.
- 82 AA, CRS A1608, item SC B19/1/2, WA Premier to Prime Minister, 6 Aug. 1940; Senator Allan McDonald (WA), Hansard, Senate, 20 Aug. 1940.
- 83 Ibid., item E19/1/2, Department of Defence Co-ordination to Prime Minister's Dept, 27 Aug. 1940.
- 84 Ibid., item B19/1/4, Army to Prime Minister's Dept, 21 May 1941.
- 85 JAMP, Vaccari to E. Rubeo, 4 Oct. 1943.
- 86 Ibid., Statement by Archbishop Mannix, 15 April 1943.
- 87 Ibid., Modotti to Father Magni, 15 May 1939.
- 88 'Mondo senz'anima', Vade Mecum, Oct. 1939.
- 89 JAMP, Modotti, Statement, 15 April 1943, p. 4.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid., Modotti to Panico, 7 May 1941.
- 92 Ibid., M. F. Toad to Modotti, 29 Dec. 1943.
- 93 Ibid., Modotti to E. Rubeo, 14 Oct. 1943; Modotti to Father Provincial, 31 Dec. 1945.
- 94 Ibid., M. F. Toad to Modotti, 29 Dec. 1943.
- 95 Ibid., Modotti to Father Provincial, 31 Dec. 1945.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 Ibid., J. Meagher, SJ, to Modotti, 11 April 1945.
- 98 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, External Affairs Memorandum, 28 June 1945.
- 99 AA, CRS A1066, item IC45/15/13/1, Bruce to Prime Minister, 8 March 1945.

9

The Italia Libera Movement

I tell you, my Italian friends, that we, small Italian community in Australia, must all group ourselves in this association ITALIA LIBERA, open to all who feel that the duty of a good Italian is to help with all means those who fight for the destruction of nazism and fascism.

(Massimo Montagnana, 18 April 1943)

At the beginning of 1942, to most Australians the war against the Fascist powers had become a desperate struggle for their physical survival. The fall of Singapore, the bombing of Darwin, the Japanese advance in New Guinea, were traumatic experiences: the enemy presence at the doors of the country made everybody aware of the need for vigilance against any possible enemy or collaborator within.

In March the members of the anti-British, quasi-Fascist and anti-Semitic Australia First Movement were secretly interned. During the same period more Italians were rounded up, especially in Queensland, where the Commonwealth government feared a Japanese landing.

In these circumstances the Italians in Australia who had opposed Fascism since its inception became aware that, for

several reasons, their old methods of fighting this doctrine were no longer effective.

First, there was widespread distrust of all Italians, whatever political ideas they claimed to profess and irrespective of their period of residence in Australia. They were suspected of being, if not actual, at least potential fifth columnists. Scared of being even remotely involved in political activities, Italians tended to shun political discussions.

As so many of them were interned, the size of the audience for the anti-Fascists, who, before the war, had concentrated their propaganda efforts almost exclusively on the Italian community, was greatly reduced. This factor, and the lack of political rapport with the Australian public promised to hamper any effort to revive the struggle against Fascism along the lines followed in the past. Many anti-Fascists recognised the need for a radically new approach to fighting Fascism; they believed that an anti-Fascist policy, in order to be effective, should take note of the changed political reality and that this new outlook should be institutionalised by the creation of a new political organisation. The isolation and, even more, the hostility which the anti-Fascists experienced during these months of 1942 magnified the blunders of their previous tactics and forced them to reassess their strategy and to plan it along altogether different lines.

They realised, for instance, that they had made a great mistake in neglecting to obtain the support, or at least the interest, of the Australian people for their cause. They had restricted their activities to the Italian community, thus failing to 'internationalise' the struggle against Fascism. In consequence of their shortsightedness, anti-Fascism before the war was understood by Australians to be a parochial squabble among migrants, and of no direct relevance to their society.² To achieve success now, Italian anti-Fascists had to win the backing of the Australian people.

Another shortcoming of Mussolini's enemies was now identified in their failure to establish a liaison with Australian politicians, who could be lobbied for their support against Fascism. Anti-Fascism had never become a pressure group. The Australian government and the politicians had been

approached only by the Italian consuls and by pro-Fascist businessmen.

Further, it was realised that in order to guarantee the success of a new anti-Fascist policy in 1942, it was necessary to attract to the anti-Fascist ranks not only the Italians who had been and were opposed to Fascism because of its totalitarian philosophy, but also those who in the past had been the victims of Fascist propaganda and were now ready to support the Allied cause and the creation of a new, democratic Italian state. The policy of confrontation carried out for twenty years had to give way to a policy of persuasion.

Also, Italians opposed to Mussolini's regime became aware that it was their duty to contribute to the Allied war effort against Fascism by forming a democratically elected organisation through which they could express their aspirations for Italy's future. In this, they were inspired by the example already given by Italian exiles in other countries. On 12 November 1941, a few Italian political refugees in Mexico City, among whom were Francesco Frola (who had been Socialist deputy for Turin and member of the Direzione of the Italian Socialist Party), Mario Montagnana (Communist leader and brother-in-law of Palmiro Togliatti) and Vittorio Vidali (the legendary Communist commander of the Fifth Regiment in the Spanish Civil War), founded the Alleanza Internazionale Giuseppe Garibaldi.3 A branch of the Alleanza was soon open in Bolivia. In New York the Mazzini Society, under the patronage of Count Sforza and of Randolfo Pacciardi, ex-commander of the Garibaldi Battalion in Spain and future leader of the partisans in northern Italy, organised all anti-Fascists in the United States, A association, the Italia Libre, was formed in Argentina.

The aim of these associations was to rally Italians abroad against Fascism, but they were hindered by the political differences which divided them. Several attempts were made to bring them together, the most notable being the Montevideo conference in August 1942, attended by all the American associations, but the result was unimpressive. Yet the need and the urgency of achieving unity of purpose was admitted by all parties: in the first place by the Italian Communist Party in exile, which for years had advocated from

the columns of its theoretical magazine Stato Operaio the need for unity among anti-Fascists,⁴ and in particular by Mario Montagnana from Mexico City who clearly saw where the political duties of Italian anti-Fascists lay. In an article published in February 1943, which outlined policies that had been put forward early in 1942, although not quite as clearly, by other correspondents of Stato Operaio, he declared that the task was:

- (1) To achieve immediately ... as much unity as it is possible to achieve right now.
- (2) To clarify, orient and organise the great migrant masses.
- (3) To be aware of, and to make known, the fact that the anti-Fascists... have the right to represent and do in fact represent the interests and the aspirations not only of the Italian migrants, but also as much as this is possible, far away from their country, and without very strong contacts with it those of the Italian people who are living in Italy.⁵

The influence of these ideas on the anti-Fascists in Australia was remarkable. At this time both Frola and Montagnana were corresponding with Matteo Cristofaro, the Melbournebased secretary of the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement. A further reason for the interest of the Melbourne anti-Fascists in the Alleanza Garibaldi was the arrival in that city of the brother of Mario Montagnana, Massimo, and of his wife. Rosa. Indeed, the presence of Massimo produced a stimulating effect on the other anti-Fascists. When Omero Schiassi, Matteo Cristofaro and Paolo De Angelis went to his residence on 3 September 1942, to meet him for the first time, it was then and there decided to form a new anti-Fascist movement in Australia, modelled on the Alleanza Garibaldi. The idea was put forward to all Melbourne anti-Fascists at a meeting at the Savoy Theatre on 6 September 1942 and was unanimously accepted: Cristofaro wrote to Mario Montagnana and announced the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement's affiliation to the Alleanza Garibaldi.

In the months which followed, the name to be given to the new organisation and the policies it was to adopt were widely discussed in Melbourne. At first Omero Schiassi, the intellectual doyen of Italian anti-Fascists, wanted to maintain the title of the old association, the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement. 6, but soon realised that a new name was needed, to symbolise the new direction taken by the anti-Fascist policy in Australia. He very much liked the name Garibaldi Anti-Fascist Movement, but immediately saw that its choice would have been a grave political mistake. At this stage, Schiassi was firmly convinced that it was imperative for the anti-Fascists to stop their policy of outright condemnation of Fascism and to appeal instead to the sentiment of national unity of all people who had previously been insensitive to the anti-Fascist call.7 The adoption of the title Garibaldi Anti-Fascist Movement would be calamitous since it would deter the two major sections of the community, the Fascists and the Catholics, from joining the new association. Schiassi rightly saw that there was no hope of creating an anti-Fascist mass movement without their support. 'We are appealing to the Fascist masses, victims of the Fascists', wrote the old Socialist, 'but how can we believe or hope, and anyhow with what political decency can we say: you Fascists become here and now anti-Fascists!'8 The very mention of the name Garibaldi would inevitably alienate the Catholics, who would not be prepared to serve in a movement named after the anticlerical hero of the Two Worlds. Eventually consensus was reached over a name (proposed by the more recent refugees, Jewish and Communist), which would avoid all ideological obstacles and would allow all people to subscribe to it without any loss of dignity. The new movement was christened Movimento Italia Libera (Free Italy Movement), and the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement of Melbourne and the Sydney anti-Fascists promptly announced their affiliation to it.9

Immediately *Italia Libera* began to formulate its new policies. It accepted Schiassi's principle that, for the sake of unity, all Italians who would be prepared to work for the Allied cause and for the defeat of the Axis should be admitted in *Italia Libera*. This concept was in line with the policy pursued at this time by the *Alleanza Garibaldi* and by the Italian Communist Party. The opening of the doors to people who had previously served in the Fascist ranks did not mean an ideological surrender. As Schiassi put it:

the stretched hand to the Fascists does not mean an *embraçon nous general*, the forgetting of all crimes committed. On the contrary. When the end will come, not one criminal must escape the just and more than earned punishment.¹¹

Another important aspect of the new policy was the concerted effort, as from November 1942, to secure the support of distinguished Australians. To this purpose, the friendships and acquaintances which Schiassi had cultivated over the years proved an invaluable asset. In particular, he was able to obtain the active co-operation of his friend and colleague A. R. Chisholm, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Melbourne University. Professor Chisholm not only translated all pamphlets and letters for Schiassi and the movement, but his most valued contribution consisted in lobbying his influential Australian friends in support of *Italia Libera*.

A third but by no means less important goal was to achieve official recognition of the movement by the Australian government, in particular, to obtain from the Attorney-General, Dr Evatt, the necessary legality to operate in the open. At the end of January 1943 Evatt was sent a letter. drafted by Professor Chisholm and signed by Schiassi, requesting the government's permission to work amongst Italians to assist in the Allied war effort. The letter stressed the fact that the movement was being sponsored by eighteen Australians, among whom were Sir Isaac Isaacs, ex-Governor General of Australia; E. J. Holloway, Minister for Social Services: Senator Don Cameron, Minister for Aircraft Production: Sir Harry Lawson, former Premier of Victoria; the writer Vance Palmer; Professor Walter Murdoch, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia; Professors A. B. Gibson and H. A. Woodruff of Melbourne University; Maurice Blackburn, Labor MHR; Judge Foster; Brian Fitzpatrick, historian and General Secretary of the Australian Council for Civil Liberties.

The Attorney-General's Department immediately consented to allow the *Italia Libera* Movement to operate as requested. ¹² There is no available evidence to explain why the Australian government at this point allowed such an organisation to work freely amongst the subjects of an enemy country. Perhaps

Canberra wanted to exploit all available anti-Fascist movements for propaganda purposes; yet there is no record showing that *Italia Libera* was used to such purpose. Most probably the sympathetic attitude of the Commonwealth was due to the life-long personal interest in the cause of Italian anti-Fascism by the Ministers Holloway and Cameron and to the social and political influence of the Australian sponsors.

At the same time, Chisholm in his capacity as honorary president and Schiassi as chairman, as well as Montagnana as general secretary of the movement, began canvassing for support among the Italian community, in anticipation of the first General Assembly of the members of *Italia Libera*. A circular letter sent to many people in Melbourne summarised quite clearly the aims and the political parameters within which the movement planned to operate, although all matters of policy and procedure had not yet been codified and had to be endorsed by the General Assembly. It was pointed out that *Italia Libera* stood:

for the ending of the Mussolini Regime; the ending of the German domination of Italy; the immediate opening of peace negotiations by Italy with the Allied countries; and a free popular election in which all Italians can decide their own future.

The letter continued:

We aim to win for the support of this programme all freedom-loving Italians whether they be Liberals, Socialists, Catholics, or former supporters of the Fascist Party. We ask the support of Australians as well as Italians for the 'Free Italy' movement. This will add strength to the movement and help to bring Government patronage and support which we are confident we can secure. 13

The first General Assembly of *Italia Libera* was held at the Assembly Hall in Melbourne on 18 March 1943. Eight hundred people were present. The Vice-Chairman, K. Petrucco, opened the proceedings by reading a letter from Dr Evatt. Then Professor Chisholm took the chair and a discussion followed on the three points which would form the political platform of the movement.

They were:

- (1) The triumph of the United Nations.
- (2) The overthrow of the Mussolini regime.
- (3) The restoration of democratic freedom in Italy.

A motion was moved by Schiassi for their adoption and it was carried by the Assembly. After the election of fifteen members to the committee and of seven to the executive committee, the question of the movement's new name was raised. Matteo Cristofaro's motion proposing that it should be called Italian Democratic Movement was defeated; instead, the resolution by R. A. Shaw, Lecturer in Italian at Sydney University, that the movement be named Italia Libera - Australian Italian Anti-Fascist Movement, was seconded by L. Stellato and carried unanimously. The committee was instructed to frame a constitution for the movement¹⁴ and telegrams were sent to Count Sforza in the United States and to Dr Frola in Mexico informing them of the foundation of Italia Libera, while another telegram was sent to Prime Minister Curtin asking for the sympathy and co-operation of his government in carrying out the movement's program. 15

A month later *Italia Libera* held its first public meeting in Melbourne. Professor Chisholm, Massimo Montagnana, Matteo Cristofaro and Omero Schiassi spoke, and E. J. Holloway represented the Australian government. The minister stressed the point that:

the Italian anti-Fascist organisation was meant to be a means by which freedom-loving Italians could help each other in an organised way, to help the Australian Government's effort towards defeating the Japanese war lords and the war against the Axis group generally. 16

His statement betrayed the government's intention not to grant the movement any special status or right of representation on behalf of Italians and the admission that its activities were tolerated only as far as they conformed to the Commonwealth policy and did not pursue an independent course. In this way *Italia Libera* Movement began its work among the Italians in Australia.

One of its first tasks was to obtain the release of all anti-Fascists from the internment camps. The movement corresponded with a large number of the internees and in many instances was able to make successful representations on their behalf to the federal government. Canberra's official recognition of Italia Libera allowed its members to lobby with increased confidence federal MHRs and cabinet ministers on problems concerning Italians in Australia;¹⁷ in particular, the government was asked to change the classification of anti-Fascist Italians from 'Enemy Aliens' to the one of 'Friendly Aliens'. Furthermore, Italia Libera protested against the discrimination practised against Italians conscripted in the Allied Works Council, since they were treated and paid worse than Australian workers and their civil rights were not respected. In addition the movement pressed the Commonwealth to allow all naturalised anti-Fascist Italians to serve in the armed forces against the Axis. 18 Matteo Cristofaro even tried to obtain permission to visit the internment camps, especially the one at Loveday, South Australia, where most of the Italians were interned, to muster support for the movement, but his request was turned down by the security service.19

Notwithstanding the inevitable failures, *Italia Libera* succeeded in obtaining the release of many anti-Fascists, some of whom were Jewish refugees who had escaped from Italy after the 1938 racial laws. They joined the movement and became its intellectual leaders.

The contacts with Italian internees at the end of 1942 and during the first half of 1943 were instrumental in the creation of a solid infrastructure for the movement. Indeed, after its official birth *Italia Libera* expanded considerably all over Australia. In New South Wales its rapid growth was, to a large extent, due to the excellent work carried out by its secretary and old-time anti-Fascist, Tommaso Saviane. He had organised a group of Italians and held weekly meetings since November 1942; in April 1943 he was already printing thousands of leaflets in New South Wales and sent 1,000 to Melbourne for distribution there. The first public rally took place on May Day 1943: the members of *Italia Libera* paraded through the streets of Sydney and its state president, R. A. Shaw, spoke to the crowd. That day forty-five people became new members. A second public rally was held on 15 August to

celebrate the downfall of Mussolini. In September and December 1943 £85 was collected on behalf of the Red Cross. During the first year of activity in New South Wales, the movement opened five branches — at Griffith, at Leeton, on the South Coast, at Broken Hill and in Canberra. By February 1944, *Italia Libera* had 300 members²¹ and had opened an office in Sydney. It had lobbied and gained the support of several Australian associations, including many trade unions, the Civil Rights League and the Anglican Bishop of Sydney. Also, 31,000 propaganda leaflets, as well as anti-Fascist literature printed in Italian and received from the United States, had been distributed all over Australia. In his report to the State Committee of *Italia Libera* in March 1944, Saviane stated that the program for the future was:

for the members to increase their activities and to convince the majority of Italians to join us, explaining to them that our Movement strives to improve the welfare of Italians, so that they can settle in Australia; therefore whoever works with us, works for his own future.²²

Throughout 1943 the activities in all states had been similar to those of the New South Wales Branch. In Melbourne the central committee printed several leaflets explaining the current political events and organised a rally on 8 August 1943, attended by 800 people, to celebrate the collapse of Fascism in Italy. *Italia Libera* members spoke at the Workers' Educational Association, at the Education Department, at the University Labor Club, at the Christian Women's Association, at May Day and International Women's Day celebrations. Dances, concerts and educational lectures were an important aspect of the movement's attempts to integrate anti-fascist Italians into the mainstream of Australian culture. Often they attracted a large Italian and Australian audience. ²³

The leaders of *Italia Libera* tried hard to make their presence felt with regard to the conduct of Italian affairs in Australia. Huge donations were made to the Victory Loans launched by the Australian government: Schiassi was proud to mention to Evatt that Italians had contributed £50,000 to the first Victory Loan campaign.²⁴ while a quota of £12,000 was set on behalf of the *Italia Libera* Movement for the second Victory Loan.²⁵

In July 1943, Montagnana asked for the federal government's permission to print a monthly newspaper, but it was not granted. In July 1944 another application was filed. Schiassi supported his request by stressing the point that:

a bulletin of ours reaching regularly the Italians living here would...help to establish a more intimate contact between them and the land where they live: their ultimate full assimilation in the Australian nation would be assisted and facilitated.²⁷

This time the application was successful, not in virtue of the arguments put forward by Schiassi, but because the security service believed that, by allowing the various factions coexisting in the movement to have a public outlet for their political discussions, it would tighten its control over the Communist minority and the more extreme elements.²⁸ Permission to publish a newspaper was granted to Italia Libera on 9 October 1944,29 and its first issue, called Il Risveglio, appeared on 30 November 1944, although bulletins of the same name had been issued since August 1944. The newspaper was sold fortnightly and lasted for many years, until 1956, when it was closed down.³⁰ Printed in Sydney by the Newsletter Printery, which was controlled by the Communist Party of Australia, 31 Il Risveglio had by June 1945 1,600 subscribers, and a further 2,000 copies were sold all over Australia, 32 out of a total printing of 4,000 copies. 33

The main aim of the newspaper was to win Italian public opinion for the anti-Fascist cause. Il Risveglio failed to achieve this goal. At the peak of its fame, it reached only five per cent of Italian migrants and its impact on the Italian community was slight.

Moreover, Italia Libera was not successful in many other respects. It did not become a mass party since it was not able to reach the Catholic masses nor the masses influenced by Fascist propaganda. It failed to win recognition from the Australian government as the sole spokesman for the Italian community and did not exploit to the utmost its political opportunities because of internal disunity. The New South Wales branch never submitted to the authority of the Executive Committee of Melbourne, and by December 1944

this body was transferred to Sydney. Disagreement existed not only on matters of authority and power: there were also fundamental differences of opinion on the political raison d'être of the Movement. Sydney was in favour of the line that Italia Libera should be a popular mass movement and should use the masses to bring pressure upon the authorities: it emphasised the necessity of attracting as many Australians as possible in order to integrate Italia Libera into Australian political life. Melbourne instead believed in the efficacy of lobbying the government directly, without attempting to involve the masses of Italians who, experience taught, were generally reluctant to join political organisations. Schiassi and Montagnana saw the usefulness of an anti-Fascist movement in Australia only in relation to the political order which would be established in Italy at the end of the war. They thought that the political future of Italy would be decided by London and that the public opinion of the Commonwealth carried a lot of weight there. By persuading the Australian government to respond favourably to their policy, the Melbourne leaders hoped to influence indirectly the outcome of the new Italian political equilibrium.

The Italia Libera Movement also failed because it was not able to produce an élite large enough to take control of Italian politics in Australia, and because the movement did not enjoy the support of any organisation or pressure group other than itself. During the first year of operation, the shortcomings of Italia Libera became evident also to its secretary, Massimo Montagnana. As early as March 1944 he complained that the movement should have at least 10,000 members, out of an Italian population of 70,000, and remarked that this quota had not been reached owing to the personal squabbles which were tearing the movement apart. Italia Libera, concluded Montagnana, could only play a modest role in defence of Italian interests in Australia.

Montagnana's appraisal of the political situation was correct. Moreover, the progress of *Italia Libera* was hindered not only by its own mistakes and human weaknesses: there also were other powers which barred the way to the anti-Fascists. The war years did not destroy the social and political infrastructure of the Italian community. Although the most

rabid Fascists were interned, other people, who had supported Fascism for twenty years but had been more restrained in their public life, were still holding positions of influence. Now, as twenty years before, they were ready to dump an uncomfortable ideological baggage: while in the 1920s they sold Liberalism for Fascism, in 1943 they traded Fascism for democracy. They were the historical reincarnation of those whom Italian historian R. De Felice calls the *fiancheggiatori*. 34

The most remarkable representative of this group was G. Vaccari. During the Fascist regime he publicly expressed his support for Fascist aggression against Abyssinia.35 On 15 July 1935, he spoke at the Club Cavour in Melbourne praising Fascism and its leaders in Australia. On 7 October 1936 he was reported to have been bestowed the title of Knight of the Crown of Italy by Mussolini's government, while in July 1937 he donated £500 to the Fascist Casa d'Italia, and on 18 May 1938 subscribed £5 to the Melbourne Fascio. 36 Author of the pamphlet The Abyssinian Question from the Italian Standpoint, which attracted the wrath of the Australian government in 1935 for its offensive remarks against the British Empire, he had conveniently taken his Certificate of Naturalisation on 27 July 1939.³⁷ Vaccari, according to Schiassi, was: 'a clever, cunning man, [who] has always been the eminence grise of Italian Fascism in Australia, and there has never been here any Fascist political activity in which, either openly or secretly, he has not had a hand in it'.38

When the war broke out, Vaccari was not interned; instead, he became the protégé of the other institution which from the outset was strenuously opposed to Italia Libera: the Catholic Church. Archbishop Mannix, and the Jesuit directly responsible to him for the affairs concerning the Italian community, Father Ugo Modotti, immediately saw that the new anti-Fascist movement was determined to win the allegiance of Italian Catholics and was undermining the political and moral authority of the Church. Their opposition, of course, was not solely an expression of pro-Fascist tendencies but was to some extent also an expression of anti-Communist fears. A few months after the creation of Italia Libera, Mannix held a rally in Fitzroy to launch a relief fund for Italy and to explain the duties of Catholics in the existing

political situation. When, before the rally, Cristofaro and Montagnana approached Mannix and Modotti and asked to be allowed to address the audience on behalf of *Italia Libera*, they were curtly refused. Instead, Father Modotti in his speech condemned the actions of Italians who rejoiced at the news that Italy had signed the armistice with the Allies as 'anti-Italian, inhuman and criminal'. Further, he said, referring to Fascism, that 'we are not ashamed of what took place yesterday in Italy'. Archbishop Mannix was next to speak. The Irish prelate declared:

I say that Mussolini is the greatest man living today. His will go down in history as the greatest Government Italy has ever had. The cultural, educational civilisation created by him, Italy and the world will always admire and hold it as the greatest in the history of the globe.³⁹

But the *pièce de résistance* was the intervention of the Federal Minister for Information, A. A. Calwell. Previously he had attended and had given his support to anti-Fascist meetings, such as that organised by the Communists of the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement at Carlton on 30 March 1942. Now he took a completely unexpected stand. He uncompromisingly stated: 'I say that those who have been associated with *Italia Libera*, that they are not rendering any service to the Italian community by maintaining that body in existence'.⁴⁰ The last speaker was Vaccari.⁴¹

After this public declaration of war on *Italia Libera*, Archbishop Mannix adopted more devious methods of political intrigue. In September 1943, he wrote to Prime Minister Curtin asking him to appoint an Italian as an accredited liaison officer between the government and the Italian community. In case the Prime Minister was in favour of his suggestion, he, continued Mannix, would be 'very happy to nominate an Italian who, I am confident, will give you complete satisfaction'. ⁴² Curtin accepted Mannix's proposal, and the name of Vaccari was suggested to the Prime Minister for consideration. The security service investigated Vaccari's past and advised the Prime Minister that 'Vaccari is *persona grata* with Security Brigadier Simpson. Major Brown knows him well'. ⁴³ It is not clear why Vaccari enjoyed the trust of the Australian Security Service, nor why the service ignored the

man's previous Fascist sympathies, since it was well informed, before the war, on what was happening in the Fascist branches and had obviously placed informers high up in the Fascist Party hierarchy in Australia. Nevertheless, on 26 November 1943, Vaccari was appointed Unofficial Italian Liaison Officer in Australia. The decision was taken at a conference between the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, the Director-General of Security Brigadier W. B. Simpson and, significantly, the Minister for Information, A. A. Calwell. 44

The appointment was a severe blow to *Italia Libera*, because it meant that the government had granted to Vaccari unofficial recognition as the sole spokesman for Italian affairs in Australia, a more or less *de facto* consular position. The setback was particularly disappointing for the anti-Fascist movement since its leaders, in June 1943, had unsuccessfully sought that role for themselves.⁴⁵

Vaccari's nomination was made public at another meeting in Melbourne on 5 December 1943, where Calwell expressed the hope that Vaccari would become the future consul-general for Italy in Australia.

In December 1943, *Italia Libera* sent a strong letter of protest because 'the Commonwealth Government has accorded official recognition to one who has always been and still is a Fascist', 46 and in February 1944 a Country Party MHR, G. J. Rankin, demanded a full review of Vaccari's nomination in consideration of the allegations that he had been a Fascist. 47 Dr Evatt replied in Parliament on 23 February, saying that 'when Mr Vaccari was authorised to act the Government had no knowledge of any alleged association by him with the Fascist Party, past or present'. By not denying Vaccari's Fascist connections, Evatt implied that the government was now aware of his political background. Further, the Attorney-General revealed that the day before his attention had been drawn to certain aspects of Vaccari's past which compelled him to ask:

the appropriate authority [the Security Service; N.d.A.] to report fully on the matter so as to enable the Government to consider whether Mr Vaccari's authority to make representations should be further continued.⁴⁸

In fact, Dr Evatt had already issued instructions on 16 February 'that the authorisation of Mr Vaccari to make representations in relation to certain members of the Italian community should be discontinued'. ⁴⁹ He went even further by declaring in Parliament on 23 March 1944 that Vaccari:

was not at any time appointed to represent the Italian community, but was merely authorised, on humanitarian grounds, to make representations to various Commonwealth departments concerned with the welfare of persons of Italian origin. ⁵⁰

Although discredited and bitter, to the point that in May 1945 he complained to Calwell of the security service's lack of co-operation.⁵¹ Vaccari continued to obstruct the progress of Italia Libera, but by now even the government had seen through his professed belief in democracy: in March 1945, in a telegram to its representative in London, the Commonwealth signalled the presence in Australia of 'a small extreme Rightist group comprising Mr Vaccari and others'. 52 One of Vaccari's most forceful attempts to denigrate the anti-Fascist movement was made in August 1944, when he sent to the Italian Prime Minister, Ivanoe Bonomi, a report on the composition and the political attitude of the Italian community in Australia. After declaring that 'politically I have never loved extreme parties', he went on trying to demonstrate that in this country Italian Fascism had made only a superficial impact and that the anti-Fascists were a handful of people without any political weight. He attacked Schiassi as a 'fanatic anti-clerical . . . visionary and apostle of an ever imminent revolution of the masses', as the holder of a 'negative philosophy'; then went on accusing the Jewish anti-Fascist refugees of having been 'generally Fascists in Italy up to 1938-1939 before the Racial Laws, and then they have been rabid anti-Fascists', and of sheltering behind the classification of Refugee Aliens in order to 'enjoy certain advantages as compared with Italian Subjects', as if they were not Italians. Vaccari continued by stating that Italia Libera was the product of the 'initiative of the Melbourne Communist group in agreement with certain recent refugees', who 'have just disowned' their country and that 'none of such refugees has the slightest intention of fighting either against Germany or against Japan'. Instead, Vaccari assured Bonomi:

the overwhelming majority of the Italian community in Australia will resist the infiltration of new false prophets in the shadow of freedom, sowers of discord and fractricidal hatreds, who would make it militant in new political extremisms in Italy. In the matter of faraway politics alien to it, such majority wishes only to be left in peace not to be urged to mix itself up with them.⁵³

If Vaccari with his racist and Fascist outbursts was the secular weapon in the arsenal of the Catholic Church, there also was a clerical one, no less efficient, in the person of Father Ugo Modotti. This Jesuit quickly realised that the struggle for the conquest of the conscience of Italians would be fought in the first place by means of an intense propaganda campaign in the press and on the radio. The correctness of his opinion was confirmed by a report of the security service which stated that: 'the mass of Italian workers, in the hands of capable leaders, might easily be swayed in a direction which would retard their assimilation, largely because of their lack of education and consequent susceptibility to propaganda'.⁵⁴

To achieve this end, as already illustrated in chapter 8, in August 1944 Modotti launched a new newspaper, L'Angelo della Famiglia from whose columns Italians were warned to beware of the anti-Fascists, who were described as atheist traitors of their Fatherland. The editorial in the first issue made clear in no uncertain terms the unequivocal opposition of the Church to Italia Libera. The readers were told: 'right now we declare that we do not share the ideas of those who are calling themselves Italians and who from Australia want to dictate their will to our country after having abandoned it'.55 At the same time permission was unsuccessfully sought from the Federal government to print another newspaper,56 and attempts were made to stop the publication of Il Risveglio by accusing its editors of picking out and publishing 'all anti-Catholic and anti-monarchical matter in order to disseminate Communist theories' 57

In short, in 1944-5 Modotti adopted the same policy which Consul-General Grossardi had carried out in 1926-8: that of branding all anti-Fascists as Communists and of setting up an effective propaganda machine. However, this time the campaign of denigration failed: the government knew that neither the editors of *Il Risveglio* nor the leadership of *Italia Libera* were Communist. The government's view was that 'the attack by Father Modotti on the policy of the paper appears to be based on religious and political grounds'. ⁵⁸ Modotti's grand design to outmanoeuvre *Il Risveglio* was not unknown to its editor, Claudio Alcorso, who was racing against time to have both the newspaper and the movement accepted by the Italian community. He realised that, as he put it, 'the reactionaries will soon try to come out with their own paper, and that is why it is vital to establish *Il Risveglio* before them'. ⁵⁹

By the end of World War II Alcorso admitted that Italia Libera's goal to become a mass movement had failed. The Catholics had been reluctant to accept its overtures and the Fascists were certainly not prepared to join such a left-wing organisation, not even after February 1945, when Alcorso dropped the word 'anti-Fascist' from the name of the movement in order to attract a wider section of the community,60 and accepted the sponsorship of people who had been in sympathy with Mussolini's government, such as Sir Raphael Cilento, President of the Dante Alighieri Society in Brisbane during the Fascist period. Alcorso was ready to go a long way on the road of compromise in order to gain widespread support. When in 1945 Italia Libera set up an organisation called Australian Relief for Italy (ARI), to collect money and food for the people of Italy, he instructed the members of the movement to be flexible. Whilst he admitted:

that we should not collaborate with the most prominent ex-Fascists, we should, at the same time, try if possible to work, on this issue, together with anybody who was not too obviously compromised even though he or she may have Rightist ideas.⁶¹

The lowering of the standards of ideological purity upset many anti-Fascists who, by May 1945, aware that the movement had failed to grow notwithstanding Alcorso's lasthour exercises in political pragmatism, became estranged from it. *Italia Libera* was not able to obtain recognition from the Commonwealth as the sole representative of the democratic aspirations of the Italian community. Canberra never consulted Schiassi or Alcorso on any problem, not even on those which were directly relevant to the affairs of Italians in Australia. After Vaccari's appointment, the leaders of *Italia Libera* were sometimes given a hostile reception by some government departments. In May 1944 the Sydney president of *Italia Libera* complained that he had experienced 'a lack of understanding, if not a deliberate misrepresentation, of our Movement, and its aims, in certain official quarters in Canberra'. The government in this respect reflected the mistrust of the community for any foreign organisation or newspaper, and did not pursue a policy in aid of the Italian anti-Fascist movement. *Italia Libera* was thus denied permission to distribute its propaganda to Italians employed by the Allied Works Council⁶³ or in prisoner-of-war camps almost up to the end of the war.

Moreover, *Italia Libera*'s efforts to draw the Australian people's attention to the anti-Fascist contribution to the Allied cause, in both Italy and Australia, achieved only a very limited success. Many Australian organisations and the press continued in their attacks against Italians in general, without giving consideration to the fact that some of them were anti-Fascists. Although the censor had instructions not to allow the publication of the word 'dago', this epithet was used on several occasions. When *Il Risveglio* appeared, *Smith's Weekly*, in an article entitled 'Another Wop Newspaper', advocated its banning, reminding the readers of *Smith*'s successful fight to ban the supplement in Italian which the Queensland *Worker* printed 'for Dago members of the AWU'.64

In the end, *Italia Libera*'s main policies failed. Alcorso's hopes of creating a mass movement were frustrated by the apathy and the political illiteracy of the Italian masses and by the xenophobic malaise of most Australians; while Schiassi's forays in international power politics were bound to meet with failure owing to the Australian government's indifference to the aspirations of a small, foreign and potentially subversive political group.

At the end of World War II, when Italy became a free nation again, the *Italia Libera* Movement had outlived its purpose and suffered a long series of setbacks which prevented the achievement of most of its immediate political aims.

Yet Italia Libera was not a complete failure, since some of its policies had a lasting effect. The movement gave to all Italians the opportunity to exercise a distinct political choice and, to those who took it, a feeling of pride in contributing to the liberation of their country. It freed many of them from the internment camps, and fought against the conformism, the bigotry and the interested opportunism of many others. Australians were urged to realise that Italians were not just a mass of stereotyped foreigners, but were human beings who cherished strong political beliefs, and who were ready to fight even their own people in order to uphold their right to social justice and political democracy.

It is difficult to measure to what extent Italian anti-Fascism was successful in these areas. All available evidence validates the claim that between 1943 and 1945 Italia Libera contributed substantially to the creation of a climate of political detente between the Italian community and the Australian people, and an indication of its success in this particular area is given by the fact that, while Italian migrants after World War I, in which Italy fought as an ally of Australia, were met in this country only with barely concealed contempt, open hostility and discrimination, after World War II, when Fascist Italy was an enemy of Australia, they found more respect and consideration than ever for their social and political problems.

Notes

- See their story in Bruce Muirden, The Puzzled Patriots, Melbourne, 1968.
- The Australian organisation before the war which most effectively supported the cause of Italian anti-Fascists, the Communist Party, in 1942 was still declared by the Commonwealth government an illegal organisation, and therefore unable to come to their aid. Significantly, the period of illegality of the CPA, from 15 June 1940 to December 1942, is coincidental with the time of the greatest depression of the anti-Fascist fortunes in Australia.
- 3 APC, Mario Montagnana to M. Cristofaro, 4 Oct. 1942.

- 4 See the article by Giuseppe Berti 'Sul Comitato Nazionale Italiano', Stato Operaio, Sept.-Oct. 1942; Mario Montagnana, 'Dopo Montevideo', Stato Operaio, Jan.-Feb. 1943; Mario Montagnana, 'Le nostre responsabilità', Stato Operaio, March-April 1943
- 5 Montagnana, 'Dopo Montevideo'.
- 6 Cristofaro Papers, 1942 file.
- 7 As he clearly put it, 'our present duty demands our coming closer to the Fascist masses: that is, our contingent task is primarily a strategic one: to deprive Mussolini of or at least to take away from him as much as it is possible the bulk of his army with whom he physically fights us. This goal can only be achieved by means of a policy of appeasement. Otherwise, we will play into the Nazi-Fascist hands' (Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Comrades, 31 Dec. 1942).
- 8 Ibid., Schiassi to Cristofaro, 6 Jan. 1943.
- 9 Ibid., Cristofaro to A. Muggia, 22 Dec. 1942.
- 10 The Alleanza Garibaldi in September 1942, by means of the clandestine broadcasting station Radio Milano-Libertà, appealed to Italians abroad to form an Italian National Committee Abroad which should strive to achieve the political unity of all Italians overseas and, in Mario Montagnana's words, 'should be a very wide organisation, attracting also the support of people who are today, very far from us'. News of the broadcast reached Cristofaro in Melbourne in October 1942 via Montagnana in Mexico City (APC, Montagnana to Cristofaro, 4 Oct. 1942).
- 11 Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 6 Jan. 1943.
- 12 Ibid., A. R. Chisholm to Cristofaro, 14 Feb. 1943.
- 13 Ibid., leaflet.
- 14 The drafting of the constitution was finished at the beginning of October 1943 by Professor Chisholm, Luigi Stellato, Omero Schiassi and F. A. L. Callill, a Melbourne lawyer who counselled on the legality of the document. The enunciation of the political objectives of the movement somehow departed from the three points approved at the General Assembly of 18 March 1943, and reflected a more militant and committed philosophy. The constitution declared that *Italia Libera* sought:
 - Peace and friendship with the democracies of the world, and active collaboration with the liberty-loving forces against all forms of Fascist reaction.
 - 2. Formation and support of a government in Italy representing all social and political strata, based on democratic principles.
 - Restoration and preservation of democratic freedom, liberation of anti-Fascist political prisoners and punishment of the Fascist criminals.
 - 4. To cement the bonds of friendship and promote more complete understanding between the Italian community and

the Australian people; advancement of Italian culture and social welfare.

(Stellato Papers, 1943 file).

15 Cristofaro Papers, 1943 file.

- pamphlet. Further evidence of the government's 16 'availability' to all anti-Fascist movements was given by the minister at this meeting when he 'welcomed the Movement and hoped the Free Italians, Greeks, French, Dutch, Yugoslavs and Czechs and other free peoples who had come to Australia would all form such groups to fight for freedom'.
- See, for instance, the case where Italia Libera, upon the advice of E. J. Holloway, asked George Martens, Labor MHR, to seek from the Director-General of Security the release of nine Italian anti-Fascists and naturalised British subjects of long standing (Cristofaro Papers, Cristofaro to Martens, 10 July 1943).
- 18 AA. CRS A989. item 455/7/2. Italia Libera to External Affairs. 28 June 1943.
- 19 Cristofaro Papers, Security Service to Cristofaro, 20 Feb. 1943.

20 Ibid., Saviane to Cristofaro, 1 April 1943.

Ibid., Massimo Montagnana to Cristofaro, 27 Feb. 1943. 21

22 Ibid., Saviane, Report dated 12 March 1944.

- 23 See, for instance, the cycle of lectures held at the Savoy Theatre from 16 February to 26 April 1944, in which Montagnana spoke on 'The Italian Republics and Tomorrow's Italy'; F. Levi on 'Modern Applications of Science'; G. Adrian on 'Elements of Evolutionary Theory'; P. De Angelis on 'Italy from 1870 to 1915'; Professor Chisholm on the 'Development of Democratic Principles in Australia'; and E. Monti on 'Italian Emigration'. The lectures did not attract a large public. Montagnana complained that at his lecture only twenty people were present. Instead the dances always attracted 100 to 150 people (Cristofaro Papers, Montagnana to Cristofaro, 19 Feb. 1944).
- AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Schiassi to Evatt, 18 July 1944. 24
- 25 Cristofaro Papers, Italia Libera, circular letter dated 31 Oct. 1944.
- Ibid., Saviane to Cristofaro, 1 July 1943; Massimo Montagnana, 26 Report dated 29 March 1944.

AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Schiassi to Evatt, 18 July 1944. 27

- 28 W. B. Simpson, Director-General of Security, declared that 'I consider that the proposed publication would assist this Service to keep a check on any undesirable or subversive elements which may endeavour to influence the policy of the Movement' (AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Service to External Affairs, 3 Aug. 1944).
- AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, External Affairs to Posts and 29 Telegraphs, 7 Feb. 1945.
- See the only available collection of Il Risveglio at the Mitchell 30 Library, Sydney.

- 31 Although printed in a Communist printery, the newspaper was not controlled nor influenced by the Communist Party of Australia. This fact was certified by the security service, which reported that 'Il Risveglio is in no way associated with the Communist Party. The printing of the paper is on a strictly business basis . . . '(AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, CIB Sydney to CIB Canberra, 5 March 1945).
- 32 Cristofaro Papers, C. Alcorso to Cristofaro, 6 June 1945.
- 33 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, CIB Sydney to CIB Canberra, 5 March 1945.
- 34 De Felice, Mussolini il fascista II, Chap. I. The term fiancheggiatori means fellow-travellers, but De Felice refers it specifically to people who supported Fascism not out of conviction, but with the aim of exploiting and channelling the movement to benefit their own personal or political interests.
- 35 Il Giornale Italiano, 10 July 1935.
- 36 AA, CRS A989, item 40/40, Appendix E, Data on Mr Vaccari. Vaccari admitted to the author that he had sympathised with Fascism in its first years but later changed his mind, and that he had been compelled by the Italian consul to take the party card in 1934 under threat of having his import permits revoked. (G. Vaccari, telephone interview, 15 Nov. 1973).
- 37 AA, CRS A989, item 40/40, Security Service to External Affairs, 21 March 1944.
- 38 Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 9 March 1943.
- 39 Ibid., minutes of the meeting, 1943 file. Neither the Age nor the Argus reported Mannix's speech in full. The Advocate (Melbourne) made brief mention of the meeting in its issue of 16 September and then on 23 September quoted Mannix as follows:

At this distance it is impossible to know what has led up to the changes and who is responsible for the removal of Mussolini. I was never a wholehearted supporter of his policy or of his principles. I am the more free to say, therefore, that in my opinion history will call him one of the big men of the century. Like many big men he seems to have failed. But Italy will never again, I hope, fall back into the state in which Mussolini found her. We can only pray God to save any good thing that he has achieved for his country and his people.

I have decided to rely upon the version contained in the Cristofaro Papers. Wherever it has been possible to check other information supplied to or collected by Cristofaro that information has always been proved reliable and accurate. For example, the report on Calwell's speech matches exactly the text of the pamphlet Did you know this? (See note 43). The speech reported in the Advocate appeared thirteen days after the meeting and might perhaps have been re-written for publication.

- 40 He went on, saying that 'I don't care what the motives of those responsible for such movements are, but even if they be the best in the world, there can be no justification in my mind for their continuation' (Stellato Papers, 1945 file, pamphlet entitled *Did you know this?* p. 8).
- 41 His conversion to the Allied cause stunned many anti-Fascists, among them Omero Schiassi, who wrote that Vaccari's political transformism 'had on me the same effect, as if I would hear—apart from the titanic difference, as between a louse and an elephant—inversely, that Stalin, betraying the Communist Party, has asked to become a member of the British Conservative Party!' (Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 9 March 1943).
- 42 AA, CRS A1608, item AA19/1/1, Mannix to Curtin, 13 Sept. 1943.
- 43 Ibid., handwritten note by Prime Minister Curtin.
- 44 AA, CRS A989, item 40/40, External Affairs to Prime Minister, 29 Dec. 1943.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 AA, CRS A1608, item AA19/1/1, *Italia Libera* to Prime Minister, 8 Dec. 1943.
- 47 AA, CRS A989, item 40/40, House of Representatives, Business of the Day No. 13, 11 Feb. 1944.
- 48 AA, CRS A1608, item AA19/1/1, Hansard, 23 Feb. 1944.
- 49 AA, CRS A989, item 40/40, External Affairs note, signed by Evatt.
- 50 AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/3, External Affairs to Prime Minister, 30 May 1945.
- 51 Vaccari protested that 'the Director-General of Security objects to my appointing personal assistants anywhere for my work which is strictly non-sectional and generally humanitarian. Vide his recent intimation that he was issuing instructions to his Deputies in all States that they must refuse to treat with or to give any information to any person whom I may so unofficially nominate' (AA, CRS A1608, item AA19/1/1, Vaccari to Calwell, 2 May 1945).
- 52 AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/11, External Affairs Memo, 27 March 1945.
- 53 AA, CRS A989, item 455/7/2, Vaccari to Italian Prime Minister, 7 Aug. 1944.
- 54 AA, CRS A1066, item E/45/19/11, Director-General of Security to External Affairs, 3 April 1945.
- 55 L'Angelo della Famiglia, No. 1, Aug. 1944, p. 2.
- 56 AA, CRS A1608, item AA19/1/1, Vaccari to Calwell, 2 May 1945.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Report to CIB dated 7 Nov. 1945.
- 59 Cristofaro Papers, Alcorso to Cristofaro, 5 Feb. 1945.

- 60 Ibid., Alcorso to Cristofaro, 6 Feb. 1945.
- 61 Ibid., Alcorso to Cristofaro, 18 July 1945. The ARI was set up in opposition to the Catholic Church's Relief to Italy from Australia, and was responsible for many shipments of clothing to Italy. In October 1945 ARI in Melbourne consigned to UNNRA sixty tons of goods collected by *Italia Libera*, while other consignments were made in Sydney and Perth.
- 62 AA, CRS A989, item 455/7/2, R. A. Shaw to External Affairs, 16 March 1944.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Smith's Weekly, 3 March 1945.

10 Omero Schiassi

... few of those who knew and liked [Schiassi] knew anything about the simple heroism with which he had spoken out, in Italy, against Fascism, or the simple devotion with which he had chosen exile rather than submission.

(A. R. Chisholm, Men were my Milestones, p. 123)

The history of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia between 1922 and 1945, as well as being the history of the ideals of social democracy and political freedom pursued by associations and movements opposed to the Italian regime, is the history of the activities of people, of individuals who passionately fought Fascism, in many instances single-handed.

Omero Schiassi was one of them: his contribution to the anti-Fascist struggle in this country was so important that failure to take it into consideration would lead the historian to an inaccurate interpretation of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia. Not only was he endowed with a remarkable intellectual capacity, but in the early 1920s he had gained wide political experience in Italy where, as a lawyer, he had enjoyed the confidence of the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party; he also

possessed a historical, legal and literary culture as did no other Italian in this country, which put him in the unchallenged position of spiritual leader of Italian anti-Fascism in Australia.

Omero Schiassi was born on 3 September 1877, at San Giorgio di Piano, in the province of Bologna. His father Guglielmo gave him a characteristically middle-class education and young Omero graduated in law at the University of Bologna. Of his youth little else is known, but he must have developed at an early age a keen interest in social problems, since at twenty-two he became First Secretary of the Provincial Federation of the Workers of the Land for the province of Bologna and occupied this position for two years, from 1898 to 1899. In 1900, the Secretary of the National Federation of the Workers of the Land, Carlo Vezzani, appointed Schiassi to the position of official propagandist for the federation. In this capacity, he travelled all over Italy, organising peasant leagues and leading the peasant strikes which took place everywhere in that year.

Soon after, he joined the Employment Office of the Humanitarian Society of Milan (Achille Loria Bequest), an institute of research on the social conditions of the working class and the peasantry; on its behalf Schiassi published a monograph on the peasants of the provinces of Milan and Ravenna. During these years he became a member of the Italian Socialist Party and was one of the organisers of the first political campaign of Ivanoe Bonomi, the reformist Socialist leader; he was well acquainted with Mussolini, but his political sympathies lay with the democratic reformist Socialists represented by Turati, Treves, Modigliani and Matteotti: he was an intimate friend of the last whom he knew from his student days when both frequented the Law Faculty of Bologna University. When the war broke out, Schiassi was conscripted and served in the army as a Lieutenant of the Alpini, with some pride, judging from his photographs in uniform.2 His was the typical reaction of a reformist Socialist who, out of patriotism, accepted his involvement in a conflict between capitalist powers which the maximalist section of the party opposed because it felt that it would only serve the interests of their class enemies.

At the end of the conflict he went back to his positions of Aldermann of the City Council of Bologna, which he had occupied since 1914, and of lawyer of the Trades Hall. He also became the editor of the journal *Socialista*.

began practising its Fascism strategy confrontation with Socialism, Schiassi fully committed himself to granting free legal aid to workers and to party members accused of defending themselves against Fascist aggression. Soon he became dangerously popular in Bologna. In 1921 the squadrists devastated the Bologna Trades Hall and also destroyed Schiassi's office, which was in the same building. At that time he was at Sorrento, near Naples, recovering from a serious illness: there, he received a telegram warning him not to return to Bologna, because the Fascists wanted him dead. A few days later he was assaulted and, in his own words, 'miraculously escaped from being murdered in my convalescing bed'.3

Most probably Schiassi attracted the attention of the Fascists not only for his legal work in favour of the Socialists, but also because he was well known for his verbal belligerency. In one of his conversations with Modigliani at the time of the occupation of the factories, in September 1920, Schiassi expressed the opinion that Matteotti should take over the power of the state.⁴

After Sorrento, he went to Rome for five or six months and then, upon the advice of Modigliani, he moved on to Genoa where he became legal counsellor to Giulietti's National Federation of the Workers of the Sea and to the Garibaldi Cooperative. His appointment to this important position was a recognition of Schiassi's faithful endorsement of the line pursued by the moderate, reformist right wing of the Socialist movement.⁵ The Fascist reaction did not take long to reach Schiassi even in Liguria. When the Fascists stormed the San Pier d'Arena Trades Hall, he was among those who repulsed the attack. On 5 August 1922, Fascist squads attacked the Genoa Trades Hall and Palazzo San Giorgio, headquarters of the Federation of the Workers of the Sea, where Schiassi had his study, and burned his papers. It was the end of his legal career and of his future in Italian politics. He decided to emigrate, but the Fascist government denied him permission early in 1924. Unmoved by the decree, Schiassi successfully manoeuvred to obtain the support of two influential Fascists who helped him out of the country under obscure circumstances: 'with his wardrobe, a modest amount of cash and a *certificato penale* of which he was strangely proud — a document attesting that he had no criminal record'.⁶

In leaving Italy he was determined not to sever his political ties with his comrades. In February 1924 he was appointed by Pietro Nenni as Australian correspondent of the Socialist Party's newspaper Avanti! (to which he would regularly contribute in the following years) and a few days later sailed from Genoa on the Ormond, bound for Melbourne, where he arrived in April 1924. The decision to emigrate to Australia reflects one facet of Schiassi's personality. He was very conscious of the state of his health and there were evidently health reasons which prompted him to choose Melbourne. An unconfirmed story, which nevertheless perfectly fits the man's character, alleges that Schiassi chose Melbourne because it had the most equable climate, or so he thought, having read somewhere that the average yearly temperature was 65° F and not thinking that averages are made up of highs and lows.

Melbourne's Italians could not avoid taking notice of Schiassi's presence. He was then forty-seven years of age, five feet and five inches tall, with blue eyes and blond hair, and wore a pointed beard à la Lenin, which he shaved a few years later. Always impeccably dressed, he was wearing the most extraordinary garments which came out of his Italian wardrobe, as by a miracle, complete with hat, gold-headed walking stick, a diamond ring and gaiters. He wryly admitted that his friends in Bologna dubbed him the best-dressed Socialist in town. This bizarre external appearance was matched by an equally eccentric character. He was the strange mixture of a man who seemed the very epitome of the Italian middle-class gentleman: almost courtly in his manners, he was aloof and conscious of his intellectual superiority and, at the same time, he was a convinced Socialist. His friend Professor A. R. Chisholm teasingly but quite accurately called him a gentleman Socialist of 1848. Enormously proud of his law degree, he insisted on being called 'Doctor', a fact which widened the gap between him and the uneducated, barely literate Italian workers and businessmen. Schiassi had a very dramatic imagination, which prompted him to exaggerate things and to let himself loose in long-winded rhetorical speeches which were admired, although often not understood, by ordinary Italians. He spoke so well that even proven Fascists flocked to his lectures and anti-Fascist rallies, to enjoy the flourish of his eloquence. His vast culture and sociopolitical background isolated him from most Italians, since they could not satisfy his intellectual needs. Schiassi was not a man of many friends, and the very few he had were almost exclusively from among Australian intellectuals who could speak Italian, since Schiassi did not speak English in 1924, nor was he ever able to master it.

Soon after his arrival in Melbourne, Schiassi became involved in anti-Fascist political activities. A rather amusing story tells that when he learned that the Italian consul-general in Australia was none other than his old-time Socialist reformist acquaintance Antonio Grossardi, Schiassi took the rather naive step for a man involved in politics for more than twenty years, of going to see him and ask for his help in getting a position appropriate to his education and legal experience. When Grossardi, seemingly unmoved by Schiassi's appeals to his sense of Socialist camaraderie, ironically offered his good services to find for him employment in a fruit shop or in a restaurant, Schiassi was outraged and they parted exchanging harsh words. 10 This story, probably true, illustrates one of the finest aspects of Schiassi's character: his steadfast loyalty to his principles of political morality. He could have compromised and done what the consul-general wanted of him. Instead he took the consequences of his opposition.

Ostracised by Italian officialdom in Australia, speaking only broken English, and living on the meagre savings which he had brought with him from Italy, Schiassi faced his destiny with great courage. He rented a room in Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, 11 where he lived in extreme poverty for many years. Yet his unshaken faith in Socialism helped him to endure his economic adversities. He was not very tolerant of any other political opinion except his own, especially of Liberalism which he believed was in collusion with Fascism.

His hatred for Fascism was a personal affair: he was particularly bitter with Mussolini and never forgave him; he looked at him as a traitor of the Socialist cause and simply hated him.¹²

Stirred by political feelings of such depth, immediately after his arrival in Melbourne Schiassi contacted many trade union leaders, Labor Party members and intellectuals, soliciting their support in his struggle against Fascism. Late in 1924 he approached Albert Monk and Don Cameron at the Trades Hall and remained their political associate for the rest of his life. ¹³ The following year he became a good friend of Professors Chisholm and Lodewyckx of the University of Melbourne, and also established excellent connections with the Australian Labor Party and with the Australian government, to the annoyance of the Italian consul-general, who did not hesitate to react against Schiassi's popularity.

In 1925 Schiassi wrote for the *Avanti!* newspaper of Milan two articles, one on the police strike in Melbourne and the other on the November federal elections. Grossardi, who was entrusted by the Italian secret police with the task of investigating the activities of anti-Fascist Italians, reported Schiassi's articles, full of praise for the unions and critical of the government, to the Home and Territories Department. In consequence of the consul-general's representation, Schiassi was refused nomination as instructor in Italian at the University of Melbourne. 14

When in 1926 Grossardi accidentally came to know that Schiassi was going to be received by the Acting Prime Minister, he immediately alerted Earle Page to the fact that: 'Omero Schiassi is for many years inscribed on the list of the dangerous Communists kept by the Italian Government and here in Australia he is always trying to carry out propaganda'. 'That this information was false (and Grossardi surely knew the difference between a reformist Socialist and a Communist!) was a fact of no importance to the consul-general: what mattered to him was undermining Schiassi's credibility and destroying his reputation. Grossardi worked towards this goal with great energy, albeit unsuccessfully. In 1927 Schiassi was appointed instructor in Italian at the University of Melbourne, with the help of Professors Chisholm and

Lodewyckx. The appointment greatly disturbed Grossardi, who this time had the effrontery to complain to Prime Minister Bruce that 'this was done without giving me any notice of the appointment and without informing me in any way that an appointment was taking place', and that it was done notwithstanding 'that the University was well acquainted with Dr Schiassi's political tendencies'. 16

Unable to stop Schiassi's nomination, the Italian consulategeneral undertook among the Italian community what Professor Chisholm called 'some lobbying of that intense and untiring kind of which Mediterraneans are often capable.' ¹⁷ Since Schiassi's salary varied with the number of his pupils, Italians were 'advised' not to attend the lectures of the anti-Fascist Doctor, thereby keeping him in poverty. ¹⁸

Not surprisingly, Schiassi was very suspicious of everybody, particularly mistrusting Italians who had recently arrived from Italy or who were not known in anti-Fascist circles. His fears were justified: Grossardi's informers kept him up to date on the activitities of the Socialist from Bologna, to the point that the consul-general knew not only what Schiassi had done, but even what he intended to do. For instance, in December 1927 Grossardi was aware that Schiassi was trying to form an anti-Fascist club in Melbourne, 19 which could be used by the enemies of the regime as a rallying point, a centre aiming at rationalising their — until then — disorganised opposition.

Why only in 1928, after four years of residence in Melbourne, did Schiassi decide to put himself to the fore of the anti-Fascist struggle in Australia? Why not earlier? There are many answers to this question. To begin with, Schiassi achieved a small degree of economic security only after his appointment at the university, and this allowed him to turn his attention to problems other than his previous pressing material needs. Also, by 1928 the political situation within the Fascist as well as the anti-Fascist camps favoured a determined drive for the leadership of the anti-Fascist movement. At this time, dissident Fascism in Australia expressed most strongly its objection to the party's being subordinate to the state (here represented by its diplomats) and reacted to the condition where people who joined the Fascist movement at a late stage had achieved the control of the local Fascist organisations, to

the detriment of the first-hour Fascists, the sansepolcristi, the squadristi. Besides, by 1928 it was evident that many Italians who opposed the regime were now ready to organise themselves: the Anarchists had already taken advantage of this trend and formed their Matteotti Club in Melbourne. The state of confusion in the Fascist ranks and the eagerness for action of many anti-Fascists convinced Schiassi that his moment had come. He also took the rather opportunist attitude of seeing himself as the natural leader of the Italian anti-Fascists, as the uomo politico who possessed the undisputed cultural prerequisites for this role.

Schiassi was spurred into action by the new anti-Fascist strategy adopted by the Italian opposition in exile as well as by the Australian political situation. In 1927 an Anti-Fascist Concentration had been formed in France, bringing together most opposition parties and aiming at presenting a united front against Fascism.²⁰ Schiassi, who, during the previous four years, had always been in contact with his Socialist friends in France, saw now the opportunity of putting Italian anti-Fascism in Australia on the map of world anti-Fascism. Supported by a few other people, in June 1928 he founded in Melbourne the Concentrazione Antifascista dell'Oceania (Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia) as a branch of the Parisbased Anti-Fascist Concentration. From the beginning he identified the problems and the tasks facing his Concentration. The most immediate problem was that of choosing its allies and of defining the terms of the alliance. The Anarchists of the Matteotti Club in Melbourne, who could also be useful for their Australia-wide network of contacts, were for Schiassi the obvious choice. Their record of militancy and toughness, their ascendancy over Italian migrants, their pragmatic approach to the problems of anti-Fascism made of them powerful allies. Moreover, Schiassi rightly saw that it was one of the main duties of the concentration to obtain the help and the collaboration all Australian political parties of associations which could be sympathetic to its aims. The ALP, the ACTU, the Socialist Party, and also the Communist Party were persistently lobbied for their support.

The birth of the Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia was publicised with much fanfare and was celebrated with a

rally at the New Gaiety Theatre in Melbourne on 10 June 1928, during which an official commemoration of the fourth anniversary of Matteotti's murder was also held. The event, which caused some concern among the Fascists and prompted Consul-General Grossardi to come to Melbourne to observe its development personally, is a useful illustration of the methods and the aims of Schiassi's policy.

All major anti-Fascist groups and organisations were represented: for the Anarchists spoke Isidoro Bertazzon; J. Shelley for the Communist Party of Australia; R. S. Ross for the Australian Socialist Party. The Federal Labor Member Maurice Blackburn delivered a eulogy of Matteotti, and so did W. J. Duggan, federal president of the ACTU and the ALP. The rally was chaired by Don Cameron, who also read messages of support from W. Maloney, the doyen of the House of Representatives; from E. J. Holloway, Secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall, and from Crofts, Secretary of the Trades Council of Australasia. The only dissenting voice was that of A. Watt, past Speaker of the House of Representatives, who expressed the opinion that Australians, not knowing the full facts, should abstain from participating in rallies of that nature.²¹

The impressive array of personalities who responded to Schiassi's appeal is evidence of his seriousness in canvassing the Italian and Australian political organisations for their support. The hundreds of people who filled the hall to the limit, and among whom stood out the red-shirted Italians of the Matteotti Club, enthusiastically welcomed Schiassi's oration in which, taking the opportunity of Matteotti's commemoration, he developed the two cardinal points of his policy: to denounce Fascism as an evil form of government and to appeal to Australians to join in the condemnation of Fascist Italy.²²

The rally was widely reported by the Australian press and Schiassi informed the most important anti-Fascist organisations overseas of the foundation of a branch of the Concentration in Australia: a pamphlet containing his speech was sent to Francesco Frola, member of the Directorate of the Italian Socialist Party in exile in Paris.²³ He also contacted the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Berlin, which, upon receiving Schiassi's pamphlet, guessing

that he wanted to open a dialogue with the Communist movement, instructed the Secretariat of the Italian Communist Party to correspond with Schiassi and to send to him propaganda material. This was done, and Schiassi afterwards regularly received from France and distributed the Italian Communist Party theoretical magazine Stato Operaio. 25

His collaboration with Communists, both in Australia and overseas, marks a significant switch in Schiassi's political philosophy and indicates a new development in the thought and the strategy of many reformist Socialists in exile who, identifying in the lack of unity of action of all anti-Fascist forces one of the main reasons for their defeat at the hands of the Fascists, were now ready to collaborate with the Communists.

Schiassi's more radical stand was confused by many as an embrace of the Communist doctrine.²⁶ Instead, Schiassi, a diligent student of Marxism, never became a Communist. He never joined the Australian Communist Party, although he was in agreement with many of its policies and patronised organisations of a left-wing and popular front nature. Ralph Gibson, the Victorian Communist leader who was closest to Schiassi, believes that there were two reasons which deterred Schiassi from joining the party: his bourgeois upbringing and intellectual snobbery, and the reason that, particularly in the late 1920s he could not stand 'another scrape with the law'.27 This second cause and the fact that Fascist propaganda never lost the opportunity to smear Schiassi for being a Communist agent, substantiate Schiassi's fears for his safety during these years. He was convinced that the Fascists were after him, trying to murder him or to deport him.28 He had already been thrown out of the Café Latin for expressing in public his anti-Fascist sentiments²⁹ and had been assaulted by the notorious Melbourne Fascist R. Budica.³⁰ An Australian historian reports that an unsuccessful attempt was made by some Italian sailors to kidnap him and to take him back to Italy.31

It is not surprising then that Schiassi sought naturalisation with great anxiety. He lodged his application exactly at the end of the required five years of residence, on 12 April 1929. But the defamatory campaign instigated against him by the

Fascist authorities bore fruit. Although the Commonwealth Investigation Branch could find 'no reason why the application should not be granted'³², the minister ruled to defer the decision for twelve months, on the grounds that: 'Schiassi is regarded in his own country as a Communist, and if he still holds Communistic views, his naturalisation would be debarred under the Minister's general ruling'.³³ When, in October 1929, Labor came to power, Schiassi thought that he had a better chance. He wrote to his personal friend A. E. Green, Minister for Defence, pleading for his case and exposing the Fascist plot for preventing his naturalisation. In the letter he stated that:

Fascists or agents of Fascism, who eventually will deny to be as such, will manage in such a way as to be asked by Police officials of the State or of the Commonwealth, informations on my account, and so to have the possibility of answering concerted falsehoods, so that the Minister, in presence of official reports, be not able to give the requested naturalisation.³⁴

He was not believed and his representation was unsuccessful: the government decided to defer Schiassi's application further. Only after E. J. Holloway, Labor MHR, interceded in his favour in February 1931 did the Minister for Home Affairs approve of the issue of the certificate of naturalisation.³⁵ An important factor for Blakeley's change of mind was a further report of the investigation branch in which it was stated that Schiassi's 'private character is thought to be beyond reproach and his opposition to the Italian Fascist movement can be understood and perhaps sympathised with'.36 Schiassi's naturalisation had been delayed because the government was influenced by the slanders intentionally circulated by the Fascist authorities: also because it was anxious to avoid a diplomatic incident with the Italian government caused by Schiassi's outspoken anti-Fascism: he had been warned by the investigation branch that his application could be favourably considered only in the case that 'his future interests would lie rather in Australian than in Italian matters', and if he would 'remove himself largely from his present political interests'.37

Evidence at present available shows bias by the Australian authorities in favour of the Fascists. While the Commonwealth

government's granting of naturalisation certificates to proven Fascists proceeded smoothly because it did not attract protests, it nevertheless established a double standard which discriminated against Italian anti-Fascists. For the latter the certificates guaranteed personal safety and protection against any request for their deportation by the Italian government; on the other hand, the Fascists who applied for naturalisation were paradoxically motivated by their wish to avoid Commonwealth deportation bv the government consequence of their extremist activities and to remain in the country in order to continue their propaganda. When Remigio Budica, one of the most violent Fascists of Melbourne, and applied certificate assailant. of Schiassi. for his naturalisation, he got it in less than a month, by virtue of Italian consular pressures and of a sympathetic investigation branch report.38

Between 1928 and 1931 Schiassi felt frustrated by this sense of insecurity. Yet he was not deterred and carried out his political activity with a courage and perseverance which attracted the grudging admiration even of his enemies.³⁹ As president of the Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia, he maintained contacts with the concentration in Paris, received propaganda material from France and distributed it to important people, to institutions and government departments. Schiassi used to send to many federal ministers opposition newspapers containing articles denouncing the manoeuvres of Fascism abroad. 40 He was quite punctilious in checking the truthfulness of all statements before giving them his support: in writing to the Prime Minister on 1 January 1930, he stressed that: 'we have been and are always very cautious in every public statement, and are giving always great care before spending a single word, to be always on the line of pure and proved truth'.42

During these years some of his initiatives were extremely controversial; in particular, he attracted upon himself the wrath of the local Fascists when he passed on to *Smith's Weekly* an article from the *Popolo d'Italia*, in which Australian workers were unfavourably compared with Italian workers⁴² and, when he announced that he had been put in charge of the project to erect a monument in Melbourne to Giacomo Matteotti.⁴³

By the end of the 1920s the Concentration had shown its limits: Schiassi had been unable to weld together the various strands of anti-Fascism and had split from the Anarchists of the Matteotti Club. The reasons for this break stem from Schiassi's belief that they were writing articles too inflammatory and acting in a way which would inevitably call for the repressive intervention of the Commonwealth authorities. Instead of their policy of direct confrontation he preferred a concerted political action aiming at rallying the widest public opinion support.

Schiassi's character and personality contributed significantly to alienating many people from his Concentration: his intellectual egotism and his social snobbery prejudiced his active participation in any association or political group, so much so that there is some truth in what an opponent of Schiassi, Vaccari, stated in 1944: that 'the Anti-Fascist Concentration in Australia never has ... counted any members apart from its founder and director, Dr Schiassi'. 45

The Depression saw the collapse of all Italian anti-Fascist organisations, including Schiassi's Concentration. Many Italians, now unemployed, left Melbourne and went looking for jobs in the bush or in Queensland; thus the Concentration died of lack of members and of financial support. Nevertheless, during these years Schiassi carefully watched for any sign of an anti-Fascist revival among Australians and Italians, and his presence was always noted at meetings of the Rationalist Society and of the Friends of the Soviet Union, at the Yarra Bank, at lectures held by the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties and at several other events. In 1936, in one of his rare public appearances, he spoke at a peace rally organised by the Victorian Council of the World Peace Congress, a body affiliated to the World Committee Against War and Fascism, which campaigned, among other things, against Italy's aggression against Abyssinia.46 When a group of Melbourne Italians set up in 1934 the Italian Group Against War, Schiassi was in close contact with its leaders but never became more than its intellectual mentor: he drafted pamphlets, gave some lectures, took part in a few meetings; he obviously shunned being dragged to the foreground of the political struggle. Similarly, in 1938, when the anti-Fascist Casa d'Italia opened in Melbourne, although he accepted the nomination of honorary president and was party to the drafting of its statute, Schiassi avoided playing an active role in its functions.

There are several reasons which can explain his behaviour. He certainly learned from his discouraging experience with the Concentration that to keep together Italians of different political beliefs was an almost impossible task; also, he had serious doubts about the possibility of activating the political consciousness of his illiterate fellow countrymen: the apathy, the personal rivalries and bickerings, the cultural and social backwardness of most of them were a serious obstacle to the achievement of this goal. Moreover, Schiassi was most probably inwardly ever-conscious of the assurance which he had given in taking up his naturalisation certificate in 1931 not to be involved too much in Italian politics: it is worthy of note that his political commitment increased in the late 1930s and early 1940s in direct proportion to the rise of an anti-Fascist conscience among the Australian government and people.

Yet Schiassi's attitude was not attributable to mere resignation or opportunism: he was a man of great moral and intellectual courage, who was never intimidated by any political threat and stood up to it. When World War II broke out, Schiassi did not hesitate to support the Allied cause and to campaign for the defeat of Fascism. Worthy of mention is his pamphlet *Italians All!* in which, with his usual vivid forensic style, he appealed to all Italians to join at once the Australian armed forces in order to make true 'the dream cherished throughout our life, for the realisation of which we have given the best part of ourselves'.⁴⁷

He was also the intellectual guardian of the Italian political groups which sprang up during the war years; in particular, the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement and the *Italia Libera*. Of the latter, the most important — in terms of membership, influence and activities — of all anti-Fascist movements born in Australia, he became president and took an active role. His renewed militancy was justified by the historical reality of those years: for the first time after two decades he saw a real chance to defeat Fascism in Italy and to establish there a

democratic system based on the principles of social justice which he cherished. He was also aware that the fight against Italian Fascism was by then somehow subordinate to the vital struggle to save from complete destruction the cultural and human heritage of Italy. In his inaugural address for the foundation of Italia Libera in April 1943, he pointed out that those were times for all Italians to unite in a spirit of national conciliation: 'Primum vivere, deinde philosophari'. First it was necessary to survive, later on we could fight about politics, he admonished: 'we are no longer concerned merely with anti-Fascism. It has now become a matter of saving Italy from the threatened chaos, from destruction, from annihilation'.48 Furthermore, the problem of the political future of Italy after Fascism required immediate attention: Schiassi believed that he and his friends could influence its outcome by persuading the Australian government to advocate their case in any future Allied post-war settlement conference.

Although Schiassi had no illusions about the amount of pressure which could be brought to bear upon the Commonwealth government, 49 he knew that any result, albeit modest, could be achieved only with a show of unity of Italians in Australia. It is against this obstacle that Schiassi's attempt to form a powerful, homogeneous organisation met its failure. He could never overcome the petty envy and vanity of many members of *Italia Libera*. In this context, he bitterly commented that Italians were 'eternal asses of Buridan . . . ever ready to put their formula before actual substance, like gourds tossing in the water', stubbornly indulging 'their chicanery while the fury of the tempest increases'. 50

His fiery character certainly did not help to dampen the contrasts: he often antagonised his colleagues with scathing personal remarks.⁵¹ In a way, he lived in his own world of ideas and hopes, which confirmed him in his unflinching opposition to Fascism. He always clamoured for moral satisfaction when he considered it due to him; this, in effect, as Professor Chisholm argued,⁵² was his philosophy in a nutshell: to stand steadfastly by your principles, against all adversities, all compromises, at any personal cost.⁵³ Schiassi was an intellectual and a great idealist: thus it is understandable why he was such a mediocre politician. He impressed people with

his culture and eloquence, but as a leader lacked charisma and failed to gain their confidence. The measure of his political naivety is shown by his waiting, after the fall of Mussolini,to be asked back to Italy by Badoglio; he even hoped that the general would send an aeroplane for him. When this did not happen, he felt very bitter.⁵⁴

The end of Fascism represented for Schiassi the culmination of more than twenty years of struggle for freedom and Socialism. During this period he braved poverty, isolation, physical violence, threats and disillusions, but his faith in the ultimate triumph of what he believed to be a just and moral cause never wavered. Some thought that he was foolish to persist in his hope for political and social justice for the Italian people: he nevertheless relentlesly waited for his soddisfazione morale, for the moral satisfaction of being proven right.

In the final analysis, his greatness lies in his moral stubbornness: he was an example, a guide to all anti-Fascists who looked to him for advice and leadership, particularly during the darkest years of Fascist international triumphs. A lonely character, 55 his paradoxical behaviour puzzled those who knew him. Although a rigorous student of Marx and Engels, he repeatedly refused to teach Marxism to his friends or to publish a newspaper for the anti-Fascist movement; 56 his atheist beliefs did not stop him from observing Christmas with solemn seriousness; a professed anti-clerical, he loved to analyse the minutiae of Catholic theology, of which he was an expert. Even his Socialism was a peculiar expression of his character: he always maintained a gentlemanly aloofness from his comrades, conscious of his intellectual superiority. 57

After the war he continued to be involved in Italian politics, sponsoring progressive causes and maintaining the presidency of the *Italia Libera* Movement up to his death on 2 January 1956 at Myrtleford, where he was buried. A memorial meeting was held at the Unitarian church in Melbourne on 22 January 1956, in the presence of 150 people, many of whom paid tribute to his memory. A cable was read from Pietro Nenni, leader of the Italian Socialist Party. On his tombstone his friends of *Italia Libera* inscribed the epitaph 'LIBERTY, HUMANITY, JUSTICE HE ADVOCATED'. They chose it because they believed that it was indicative of the principles guiding

Schiassi in his political activity. Truly, these words epitomise his idealistic approach to politics, in contrast with his professions of Socialism: an approach similar in many respects to that of the *Giustizia e Libertà* movement in Italy and equally destined to failure for its naivety.

Indeed, it is this divorce from reality which characterises Schiassi's greatness as a spiritual leader as well as his mediocrity as a political organiser. But notwithstanding his limitations, Schiassi was instrumental in keeping alive the flame of Italian anti-Fascism, and if an opposition to Fascism could exist in Australia throughout the lifespan of the regime, it was to a large extent indebted to the untiring activities and teachings of the Socialist intellectual from Bologna.

Notes

- 1 Il Risveglio, 18 April 1945. For a history of the National Federation of the Workers of the Land, see Renato Zangheri (ed.) Lotte agrarie in Italia. La Federazione nazionale dei lavoratori della terra 1901-26. Milano, 1960.
- 2 Later Schiassi confessed his embarrassment as a Socialist for these photographs, which betrayed his youthful militaristic enthusiasm for the uniform (A. R. Chisholm, interview, 18 Dec. 1973).
- 3 Il Risveglio, 18 April 1945.
- 4 To which Modigliani, reflecting the reformists' indecision to take upon themselves the responsibility of government, replied: 'Yes, but what would he do with it?' (Gibson, interview, 28 May 1973).
- 5 In Genoa, writes Tasca, 'the workers movement is in the hands of the "autonomous" Socialists, that is of those outside the official Party, Socialists of the extreme Right, who have been in favour of Italy's intervention in the World War' (A. Tasca, Nascita e avvento del Fascismo, Bari, 1971, pp. 346-7).
- 6 A. R. Chisholm, Men Were My Milestones, Melbourne, 1958, p. 117. Schiassi claimed that he 'played a trick on the one who boasts of being the most cunning man on earth, the most swinish Benito Mussolini. I left Italy with his consent, without asking anything of him' (Il Risveglio, 18 April 1945).
- 7 C. A. McCormick to author, 17 May 1972. Also, F. Carmagnola, interview, 18 Sept. 1971.
- 8 Chisholm, interview. For an accurate and sympathetic character portrait of Schiassi, see Chisholm, Men Were My Milestones.
- 9 Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973.
- 10 Carmagnola, interview; Saviane, interview, 7 Nov. 1971.

11 He remained faithful to Clarendon Street to the end of his life, changing residence only once, from No. 140 to No. 142. Ralph Gibson remembers that Schiassi once boasted of having outlasted seven landladies who in vain tried to oust him in order to charge higher rents to new tenants (Gibson, My Years in the Communist Party, pp. 65-7). One of the landladies served him a notice to quit on 13 December 1943, giving as her reason that 'you have been guilty of conduct which is a nuisance or annoyance to adjoining or neighbouring occupiers by throwing water on another tenant and assaulting him and also by making noises during the night'.

12 Chisholm, interview.

13 Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 29 July 1946.

14 Grossardi boasted of his negative influence in the affair in a letter to the Secretary of the Acting Prime Minister, Earle Page: in it he claimed that 'Dr Schiassi applied a while ago for the position of teacher of Italian at the Melbourne University but his application was not accepted and I have reason to believe that the University applied for information to the Home and Territories Department' (AA, CRS A1606, item SC C5/1, Grossardi to Strahan, 1 Dec. 1926).

15 Ibid.

16 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Grossardi to Bruce, 2 Dec. 1927.

17 Chisholm, Men Were My Milestones, p. 118.

18 Gibson, My Years in the Communist Party, p. 66. Schiassi was a very fine Dante scholar, and the university commissioned him to write a commentary on the Divine Comedy, which he undertook in the Italian language, but never finished. Worth noting is the fact that his political commitment was so intense that even his lectures on Dante were coloured by his political views. He used to comment, rather amusingly, that the tragedy of Paolo and Francesca would not have happened had Italy had a better government, preferably a Socialist one (Chisholm, interview).

19 AA, CRS A446, item 57/67255, Grossardi to Bruce, 2 Dec. 1927.

20 For an analysis of the policies of the Anti-Fascist Concentration and of the Italian Socialist Party in exile, see Simona Colarizi, 'Il Partito Socialista Italiano in esilio (1926-1933)', Storia Contemporanea, No. 1, March 1974, pp. 47-91.

21 See Fascism Exposed!, pamphlet, undated.

22 Carried away by strong emotion, Schiassi solemnly declared that 'the Anti-Fascist Concentration of Australasia denounces to the Australian people and to its legitimate representative, the Right Honorable Stanley Bruce, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, Benito Mussolini and his Government!

> Liberty is the goal, which is so dear As he knows, who for it lays down his life. Dante'.

- He also urged Bruce 'to say to the world that Italy does not deserve executioners, but civic rule and liberty' (ibid).
- 23 APC, Mario Montagnana to Cristofaro, 4 Oct. 1942.
- 24 The Communist International saw a chance 'to carry out even there some work in the direction of the proletarian united front', a position which was broadly coincidental with Schiassi's strategy at the time (APC, Tasca? to PCI Secretariat, 5 Dec. 1928).
- 25 Gramsci Institute to author, 4 April 1972.
- 26 At the time his Australian friends could not appreciate the difference between a Socialist and a Communist: Professor Chisholm in his Men Were My Milestones described Schiassi as 'an uncompromising Socialist' but believed that 'he held Communist views' (Chisholm to author, 2 July 1972). C. A. McCormick 'did not know if he was formally a Communist, but he seemed to share their ideas' (McCormick to author, 17 May 1972).
- 27 Gibson, interview.
- 28 Chisholm, interview.
- 29 AA, CRS A1, item 31/721, Department of Home and Territories, Memorandum No. 29/3939, 30 April 1929.
- 30 Paolo De Angelis, interview, 17 Dec. 1973; Italo-Australian, 13 Sept. 1930; La Riscossa, 1 Oct. 1930.
- 31 Walker, Solidarity Forever, p. 48; Bertha Walker, interview, 3 Oct. 1973.
- 32 AA, CRS A1, item 31/721, Attorney-General's Dept to Home Affairs, 22 April 1929.
- 33 Ibid., Department of Home and Territories, Memorandum No. 29/3939, 30 April 1929.
- 34 Ibid., Schiassi to A. E. Green, 21 April 1930.
- 35 Ibid., Blakeley to Holloway, 20 Feb. 1931.
- 36 Ibid., Attorney-General's Dept to Home Affairs, 19 Feb. 1931.
- 37 Ibid., Department of Home and Territories, Memorandum No. 29/3939, 30 April 1929.
- 38 The Melbourne Fascist consul, Mario Melano, rather ironically swore that Budica 'has always been of excellent behaviour' (AA, CRS A1, item 28/1049, Melano, Certificate, 18 Jan. 1928), and the Commonwealth Investigation Branch reported that although Budica 'is a member of the Italian Fascist movement in this city, he appears to be quite a suitable subject for naturalisation' and recommended 'that his application be treated as an urgent one' (AA, CRS A1, 28/1049 Attorney-General's Dept to Department of Home and Territories, 24 Jan. 1928).
- 39 See Battistessa's articles in the Italo-Australian, 30 June 1928, 3 Nov. 1928.
- 40 AA, CRS A981, item Fascism 1, and AA, CRS A1, item 31/721.
- 41 A.A., CRS A981, item Fascism 1, Schiassi to Scullin, 11 Jan. 1930.

42 Smith's Weekly, 6 Sept. 1930; Italo-Australian, 13 Sept. 1930.

43 Italo-Australian, 21 June 1930.

44 Schiassi had great contempt for the violent methods of the Anarchists: 'they are all a bunch of rogues', he used to say (De Angelis, interview).

45 AA, CRS A989, item 455/7/2, Vaccari to Bonomi, Report, 7 Aug. 1944.

46 Workers' Weekly, 11 Sept. 1936.

47 Italians All! pamphlet, 16 Jan. 1942. The closing paragraph of this appeal is an excellent example of Schiassi's rhetorical style and also contains in a nutshell his political philosophy: 'Forward, forward, Italians all, worthy of the name of Italians; forward with torch in hand, and axe, and book, and sickle and hammer: with the torch, in order not to deviate from the right path; with the book and axe, to cut through the branches and roots of ignorance; with the sickle, to reap the substance essential for physical and intellectual well being; with the hammer, to construct the new society; and in the same fleeting instance in which we address ourselves to you, with the rifle, to lay low the upholders of barbarity!'

48 Italia Libera, pamphlet, 18 April 1943.

49 In 1943 he warned the anti-Fascists not to delude themselves that they were a powerful pressure group. Speaking of the *Italia Libera* 'It is my modest opinion' he said, 'that we must beware the possible handicap of preparing giant clothes for a future baby still in its foetal state' (Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 25 Feb. 1943).

50 Italia Libera, pamphlet, 18 April 1943.

51 He told Matteo Cristofaro that he was so uneducated that he was unable to pronounce correctly even his own name (Chisholm, interview). On another occasion he blasted the NSW President of the *Italia Libera*, R. A. Shaw, for allegedly attempting to take over the control of the Movement: 'this moral slime' wrote Schiassi, 'nothing else but unlimited, unrestrained, burning ambition, Shaw has proven himself to be a harmful element, a serious danger, a permanent threat to our Movement' (Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 7 March 1944).

52 Chisholm, Men Were My Milestones, p. 124.

53 He was rightly proud of the fact that, as he wrote, 'I have been left alone during my long political life in decisive circumstances, but the facts have always proven me right' (Cristofaro Papers, Schiassi to Cristofaro, 23 Sept. 1943).

54 Judah Waten, interview, 29 May 1973.

55 Man of few friends, Schiassi did not seen to have had a romantic life, although it was alleged in 1932 that he wanted to bring his fiancée to Australia, but was refused permission by the Italian authorities because of his anti-Fascist activities (Italo-Australian, 24 Sept. 1932).

- 56 Cristofaro, interview, 29 May 1973.
- 57 Sometimes Schiassi quite impudently showed off his lack of modesty. In 1931 he assured Holloway that 'I am not a great deal inferior to the man in the street: to that, I am proud to say that I am superior for a scrupulous sense of duty and honesty' (AA, CRS A1, item 31/721, Schiassi to Holloway, 20 Nov. 1931).
- 58 The Guardian, 26 Jan. 1956.

Conclusion

The end of World War II and the collapse of Fascism in Italy set the stage for the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Italians in Australia, which began in 1947, when the Minister for Immigration, A. A. Calwell, launched his program of mass immigration. During the ensuing twenty-five years, hundreds of thousands of Italians took advantage of this policy decision and settled in Australia. integrating themselves into the pre-war Italian communities (which, on the surface, bore little evidence of having been scarred by their Fascist interlude) and, by the sheer weight of their numbers, drastically changing the character of these communities. The demise of Fascism meant the historical end of a period of political struggles which began with the surging of Fascism as well as with the considerable increase in size of Italian settlement in Australia. During this period, the Italian migrants, for the first time in their history, voiced openly, even when the odds were heavily against them, their passions, their ideas, their hopes, and expressed their political aspirations through their associations, clubs and activities, as has been seen in the previous chapters.

It seems appropriate now to conclude by gathering together the main strands of argument pursued throughout this study.

Although the activities of Italians in Australia in support of or in opposition to Fascism were of minor importance if compared to the overall pattern of Australian history of those years, they were significantly relevant to the history of the migrant communities of this country. Isolated for religious, linguistic and socio-economic reasons from Australian political life, the majority of Italian migrants adapted themselves to a life which shunned active political participation. Their behaviour with respect to their Australian condition was nevertheless reminiscent of the political apathy which for generations they had shown in Italy, where they had felt hopelessly alienated from the central government and from any form of political activity.

Only a minority of better educated migrants in the 1920s and the 1930s expressed their political opinion with regard to Fascism, and it is extremely difficult for the historian to ascertain whether their feelings were motivated by conscious acceptance of the Fascist principles, or by emotional nationalism, or whether Fascism was opposed out of rejection of its dictatorial connotations, or out of resentment of a government and a social system which had compelled them to emigrate. Fascist and anti-Fascist activities in Australia followed the same pattern as in other countries, such as the United States, France and Argentina, with periods of enthusiastic support for the regime, as during the Abyssinian war, or of militant opposition to it, as in the years of the Matteotti Club and of the Italia Libera Movement.

What distinguished the Fascist as well as the anti-Fascist movements in Australia was the absence in their midst of an intellectual and of a professional political élite which could create the conditions favourable to political mass movements. This explains also the relative incapacity to rouse the political sensitivity of Italian migrants, as well as the isolation of both movements from the main stream of initiatives taking place overseas. There was no international Communist conspiracy nor a Fascist International pulling the strings of Italian politics in this country. With the exception of irregular contacts with the Comintern, the Italian Communist Party in exile, the Concentrazione Antifascista, or the Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero, there was no planned international co-ordination of anti-Fascist or Fascist activities, although this consideration is less relevant for the latter. Distance and the lack of reliable communications compounded the difficulties just mentioned.

The low standard of education of the Italian migrants also favoured their estrangement from political life; moreover, they were deterred by some aspects of Fascist and anti-Fascist propaganda, in particular by the anti-Fascists' outright commitment to destroy the institutions which had aided and abetted the ascent of Fascism, namely the bourgeois state, the Church, the monarchy and the capitalist system. Fascist propaganda on the other hand exacted unquestioning obedience to the policies of the regime, in this way favouring political conformism and discouraging any personal opinion. World War II, the understandable suspicion and hostility towards Italians by Australian authorities and people, internment, the feeling of being enemy aliens in a foreign country, conditioned Italians even further against an uninhibited participation in the democratic process.

This legacy of frustration and of apathy was evident in the post-war period, when Italian migrants began exercising, albeit slowly and timidly, their rights as free citizens in a pluralist society. Too many of them still believed that politics was a 'dirty business', the exclusive domain of the powerful and the educated, and that they could not alter significantly their social and political conditions by taking part in political activities.

Even today the legacy of Fascism is still conditioning the attitudes of those Italians in Australia (as well as in Italy) who claim that a dispassionate historical analysis of the Fascist period is not possible because not enough time has elapsed to allow historians to write 'objectively', as if, by suspending their research on this period, historians could somehow acquire at a later stage that antiseptic objectivity, devoid of any moral, social or political implications for the present times, which the unwitting supporters of this opinion prefer to shun.

In fact, if, taken in this context, Croce's dictum that all history is contemporary history is still valid, even more

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poignantly relevant is Renzo De Felice's view, expressed in his Intervista sul Fascismo, that, until we can face the problem of Fascism in historical terms, we will not free ourselves from all those contradictions and inabilities to understand not only Italian history, but even its politics or its current affairs. Inspired by De Felice's remarks, this study on the attitudes of Italians in Australia towards Fascism aims at being a small contribution to a better understanding of their history in this country.

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Gianfranco Cresciani migrated to Australia from Italy in 1962 and graduated from the University of Sydney in 1971. He has since worked on the history of Italians in Australia and has published many articles on the subject. During study trips to Italy he has carried out extensive research in Italian archives on the history of Italian migration to Australia. He is at present lecturing in Italian history for the University of Sydney Board of Adult Education.



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