History and Collective Memory of the Italian Migrant Workers’ Organisation FILEF in 1970s Melbourne

Submitted by

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Particular thanks are due to Giovanni Sgrò, the veteran secretary of FILEF, and wife Anne for allowing me to consult the 1970s record files at the FILEF office in Coburg, Melbourne. I am also grateful to ex-FILEF members Roberto Malara and Gaetano Greco who first talked to me about the organisation and its history, and put me in contact with many other ‘Filefians’.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents Agnese and Paolo Battiston and my twin brother Roberto, who offered me practical and moral support in times of need since my arrival in Australia in 2000.

I alone am responsible for any mistakes and deficiencies of this study.

¹ Two remaining informants, Franco Lugarini and Emilio Deleidi have passed away since the drafting of this thesis. I would here like to reiterate my gratitude for their collaboration.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGIF</td>
<td>Antonio Gramsci Institute Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGWS</td>
<td>Australian Greek Welfare Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMWU</td>
<td>Amalgamated Metal Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANFE</td>
<td>Associazione Nazionale Famiglie degli Emigrati (National Association of Migrants’ Families)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWIU</td>
<td>Building Workers’ Industrial Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally And Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPD</td>
<td>Committee Against Political Deportations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATU</td>
<td>Clothing and Allied Trades Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCIE</td>
<td>Comitato Consultivo degli Italiani all’Estero (Advisory Committee for Italians Abroad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCL</td>
<td>Council for Civil Liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Club Italiano-Australiano (Italian-Australian Club)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIAL</td>
<td>Consiglio Italiano-Australiano del Lavoro (Italian-Australian Labour Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Comitato Italiano di Coordinamento (Italian Committee of Co-ordination)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISL</td>
<td>Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Chief Justice [of the High Court of Australia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHOMI</td>
<td>Clearing House on Migration Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGIL</td>
<td>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Federation of Labour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNEL</td>
<td>Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e del Lavoro (National Council for Economy and Labour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COASIT</td>
<td>Comitato Assistenza Italiani (Italian Welfare Committee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMITES</td>
<td>Comitato degli Italiani all’Estero (Committee of Italians Abroad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA (M-L)</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)</td>
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CPSU  Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CURA  Centre for Urban Research and Action (FEC before 1975)
CTU  Clothing Trade Union
DC  *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democratic Party)
DLP  Democratic Labor Party
DP  Displaced Person
DS  *Democratici di Sinistra* (Democrats of the Left; PDS before 1998, and PCI before 1991)
DKP  *Deutsche Kommunistische Partei* (German Communist Party)
EMC  Ecumenical Migration Centre
FEC  Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre (renamed CURA in 1975)
FM  FILEF Melbourne
FGCI  *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana* (Italian Youth Communist Federation)
FILEF  *Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori Emigrati e delle loro Famiglie* (Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and their Families)
FLAIEU  Federated Liquor & Allied Industries Employees’ Union
FMA  FILEF Melbourne Archive
FMWU  Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union
FSPDU  Federated Ship Painters & Dockers’ Union
FWG  FILEF Women’s Group
GNC  Good Neighbour Council
GPF  Greek Professionals Association
INCA  *Istituto Nazionale Confederaile di Assistenza* (National Federal Institute of Assistance)
IPCIF  Independent PCI Federation [of Australia]
J or JJ  Justice, or Justices [of the High Court of Australia]
LIA  *Lega Italo-Australiana* (Italian-Australian League)
LOTE  Languages Other Than English
MLC  Member of the Legislative Council
MP  Member of Parliament
MWC  Migrant Workers’ Conference
MWU  Miscellaneous Workers’ Union
MWU  Meat Workers Union
NOW  North-west One-stop Welfare Centre
NSW  New South Wales
OAM  Order of Australia Member
OPU  Operative Painters Union
PCA  *Partito Comunista Australiano* (Communist Party of Australia)
PCI  *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, renamed PDS in 1991, and DS in 1998)
PDS  *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left; PCI before 1991 and renamed DS in 1998)
PGEU  Plumbers & Gasfitters Employees’ Union
POW  Prisoner of War
PM  Prime Minister
PSA  *Partito Socialista Australiano* (Socialist Party of Australia)
PSI  *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party)
PSIUP  *Partito Socialista Italiano di Unione Proletaria* (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity)
SBS  Special Broadcasting Service
SPA  Socialist Party of Australia
UIL  *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (he Union of Italian Labour)
UAW  Union of Australian Women
USSR  Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
TUTA  [Australian] Trade Union Training Authority
VBEF  Vehicle Builders’ Employees’ Federation
VCOSS  Victorian Council of Social Services
VECC  Victorian Ethnic Communities Council
VTHC  Victoria Trades Hall Council
VTU  Victorian Teachers Union
WRCRC  Western Region Community Relations Committee
WSIWC  Western Suburbs Italian Workers Committee
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SUMMARY

This doctoral dissertation seeks to investigate the reasons that lay behind the rise, success and decline of the Italian-run migrant workers’ organisation FILEF during the 1970s in Melbourne by reviewing and discussing some significant historical events. It does so in light of the existing literature, archival data and a string of oral accounts gathered from former and current key FILEF members and collaborators. It is hereby offering a better understanding of an otherwise poorly researched area of the Italian-Australian left-wing grassroots organisations in post-war Australia. The thesis has been divided into two parts, including introduction and conclusion. Part One (Chapters 1-5) reviews the historical and political background (in both Italy and Australia) that favoured the establishment of FILEF in Australia, including Melbourne, in the early 1970s; Part Two (Chapters 6-9) presents an analysis of the historical development and socio-political role of FILEF Melbourne between 1972 and 1980.

Chapter One reviews the theoretical context, the representation of the history of FILEF in previous publications, primary and secondary sources, the research strategy and methodology. Chapters Two and Three anchor the history of FILEF Melbourne to their respective background in Italy and Australia. That is, Chapter Two examines the post-war Italian emigration and its politicising by the Italian Left; Chapter Three focuses on the post-war emigration of Italians to Australia and outlines a profile of the Italian-Australian community. Chapter Four maps the route of the Italian-Australian Left in the 1950s and 1960s, that is from Italia Libera to the Lega Italo-Australiana. Chapter Five reviews the circumstances that led the establishment of the PCI in Australia respectively.

Chapter Six examines the origins and grassroots activism of FILEF in Melbourne in the 1970s, especially by looking at three areas of activity: migrant press, migrant welfare and migrant politics. Chapter Seven researches the vulnerability of FILEF to the pressures of conservative quarters by recounting the ‘Italian communist move in’ (1975) and the federal funding cut (1976) episodes. Chapter Eight, thoroughly revisits the Salemi case (1977), while Chapter Nine explores the effects of the case and Salemi’s deportation on FILEF towards the end of the 1970s.
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis concerning the interviews and the private collection records gathered, were approved by the relevant Faculty Human Ethics Committee as appropriate (application no. 372/01).

Simone Battiston

5 November 2004
INTRODUCTION

Political scientist Don Aitkin once argued that the whole area of migrant politics in Australia was far from being fully and properly investigated, especially at the very local level: “It remains true that we will not have real knowledge about migrants and politics until we first know a good deal about Australian Greeks and politics, Australian Italians and politics, and so on” (Aitkin, introduction to Jupp 1984a: 2-3). Comprehensive knowledge on the politics of migrants could only be acquired, Aitkin implied, through thorough background research into ethno-specific organisations, from grassroots level up.

James Jupp, a leading scholar on multicultural studies, explained the lack of research in this way: “Perhaps the simplest explanation lies in the ‘excluded’ and ‘peripheral’ character of ethnics in most professions, [including that of the political scientists]. There are simply very few academics with the language skills and social access necessary to penetrate ethnic communities” (Jupp 1984b: 7-8). Jupp pointed out that there was also a more noteworthy explanation: the general lack of academic interest in Australia “[…] in community structures, in politics at the lowest levels, in municipalities, in party and union structures, in local and ethnic associations” (ibid.: 8). Combined with “the low political profile of most ethnics as contrasted to their role in the United States, Canada or even Britain”, academic interest on the political history of the ethnics in Australia was to remain marginal for the time being, according to Jupp (ibid.).

Australian political scientist and economist Gianni Zappalà, who in more recent times provided a valuable insight into ethnicity and representation in Australian Federal politics (Zappalà and Dept. of the Parliamentary Library Australia 1997), claimed that, rather than a general paucity of research in the field, the real issue for studies on ethnic politics and ethnic representation in Australia was the ‘dominant’ approach adopted by the political science community, whose emphasis remained on the macro-level institutions, i.e. Parliament, electoral systems, political parties, (ibid.: 1-2). Since the 1990s, however, a number of studies – many of which were conducted in university-based research centres of multicultural studies in Australia by academics from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds –
have attempted to bring new scholarship to the field and challenge the arguable “dominant assimilationist intellectual climate” denounced by Zappalà (Zappalà and Dept. of the Parliamentary Library Australia 1997: 30-31, endnote 3).

Yet there remains a dearth of studies on ethnic politics in Australia, especially as far as Italian-Australian political participation and representation is concerned. For instance, studies on political activity (and politicking) within Italian-Australian community-based institutions and grassroots associations present considerable gaps, and the observation of migrant studies historian Gianfranco Cresciani still holds true today: “non si sa nulla sulle attività politiche comuniste e fasciste in Australia nel dopoguerra e sui rapporti tra emigranti a partiti politici italiani” (hardly any research has been done on the post-war political activities of Italian fascists and communists in Australia, and on the relationship between Italian-Australian migrants and Italian political parties) (Cresciani 1988a: 56). One explanation for this (among other possible explanations such as data accessibility and availability) may lie in the chronically marginal position that is assigned to migrant politics within the area of Italian-Australian migrant studies. Italian-Australian migrant studies have paid considerable attention to for example, immigration, settlement, ethnicity, social integration, migrant identity and cultural maintenance, but much less so the politics of ethnics, and ethnic political participation and representation in Australia. Apart from the in-depth work by Cresciani (1980) on Italian-Australian fascists and anti-fascists before and during the Second world war scholars have rarely tried to come to terms with Italian-Australian politics. In the past, some academic dissertations began however to explore this area of research. For example, Mauro Di Nicola’s thesis (1973; see also the published version of 1984) examined the political impact of Italian migrants in Leichhardt (Sydney) between 1961 and 1973; Carlo Carli’s dissertation (1982) provided valuable insights into Italian-Australian politics of post-war Melbourne; and Anthony Cappello’s thesis (1999) analysed the religious, cultural and political impact of the Catholic Church on Italian-Australians during Fascism, the war and the immediate post-war period.

But if “real knowledge about migrants and politics in Australia” is to emerge, as Aitkin argued some twenty years ago (Aitkin, introduction to Jupp 1984a: 2-3), the post-war political activities of Italian-born Australians and Australians of Italian ancestry and their participation in party and union structures, pressure groups and politically-minded
organisations ought to be more fully investigated. To contribute to this investigation, this
dissertation aims to look into past events and present recollections of an Italian-run, left-
leaning organisation which has not attracted the scholarly interest that has been granted to
other organisations, despite its involvement in the emancipation of migrants in Australia, its
activism in the migrant rights movement of the 1970s, and its broader influence on the
Italian-Australian community: the Australian Chapter of the Italian Federation of Migrant
Workers and their Families (FILEF) and more exactly its Melbourne branch in the 1970s.
Moreover, the 1970s history of FILEF Melbourne, which showed successful pro-migrant
lobbying as well as organisational failures and political sectarianism, can be viewed as a
telling example of the political potentials and limits of the Culturally And Linguistically
Diverse (CALD) lobby in Australia. Contemporary CALD community organisations,
especially if voicing the views and concerns of recent newcomers’ groups (e.g. Asian,
Middle Eastern and African migrants) could see this study as a valuable contribution to the
understanding of past pro-migrant lobbying in Australia, which saw several ethnic and pro-
ethnic associations – with their political culture and grassroots activism – apply pressure on
governments for support services and multi-cultural policies.

Studies on the degree of ethnic participation and representation in Australia’s political
arena could perhaps not be more appropriate at a time in which Australian society appears to
be “less inclusive” than just a few years ago, when Australian multiculturalism arguably
reached its visible peak at the time of the Olympic Games and Australia’s Centenary
celebrations. The rising political profile of CALD Australians (including, for instance, the
recent generational and demographic changes in NSW Labor government and state politics,
as a new generation of Italian- and Greek-Australians have gained political power) tells us
that ethnic politics is now far from being a peripheral and out-of-date topic for academic
discussion. Thus, the history of grassroots-level activism, such as that of FILEF Melbourne,
from the ranks of which come Victorian Labor state politicians Giovanni Sgrò and Carlo
Carli came from, can potentially be as significant as the history of macro-level political
institutions.

Especially in Melbourne and Sydney, FILEF played a prominent role in politicising local
Italian-Australian migrants and encouraging them to be actively involved in community
activities and in migrant rights’ organisations. As opposed to other Italian-Australian
community organisations, e.g. the welfare assistance committees (COASIT) of Melbourne and Sydney, FILEF aimed to jolt the political consciousness of Italian migrants in Australia into “a more advanced stage of political awareness”, while exerting pressure in institutions within and beyond the Italian-Australian community to foster “a ‘cultural conscience’ among Italian workers” (Cresciani 1988b: 281).

This dissertation aims to provide a critical, analytical account of key events in the history of FILEF Melbourne during the 1970s, using archival data and fresh information from oral history testimonies of FILEF members. It also aims to provide a re-examination of the political and social role played by FILEF Melbourne in the Italian-Australian community. The reasons behind the rise, success, and decline of FILEF Melbourne between the early 1970s and the early 1980s are investigated. It is argued in this dissertation that, although FILEF lost much of its influence as a vocal ethnic organisation in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, its ‘political experiment’ in Melbourne in the 1970s, as well as in other Australian cities, has continued to influence the life trajectories of many FILEF activists, leaving deep traces in Australian political and cultural life. Moreover, it is argued that not only has FILEF been the launching pad for the professional careers of some of its members, but at a smaller scale it forged the political conscience of rank-and-file activists and ordinary members, who through their activism or presence in FILEF were able to retain, express and foster their political culture (whether of communist, Labor, or broadly left-wing background).

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Part 1 ( Chapters 1-5) specifies the framework of study and reviews the historical and political background (in both Italy and Australia) that favoured the establishment of FILEF in Melbourne and other Australian cities in the early 1970s. In Part 2 ( Chapters 6-9) an analysis of the historical development and socio-political role of FILEF Melbourne between 1972 and 1980 is presented.

Within Part 1 of the dissertation, Chapter One set the theoretical framework, reviews the representation of the history of FILEF in previous publications, elucidates the research strategy and methodology, and lists the primary and secondary sources. Chapter Two focuses on the manner in which the issue of emigration was politicised by the Italian Left in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, paving the way for the establishment of left-wing grassroots migrant organisation FILEF. The history of the PCI Emigration Office in Rome (with which FILEF shared close links since its establishment) is discussed in the light of the politicisation
of emigration and the immigrants, who were by and large of peasant and working-class background. The aim of both FILEF and the PCI to encourage migrants to be more actively involved in their host society and to cultivate a political allegiance is outlined in this chapter, and the political-historical background of 1970s Italy is explored, both of which are pivotal to a contextualization of relevant events.

In Chapter Three a review and historical contextualisation of the different waves of post-war Italian emigration to Australia is presented. It outlines the socio-economic impact of post-war Italian settlement, and contains a discussion of the radical transformation of the social fabric of urban Australia following the settlement of Italians, primarily in booming urban and industrial centres such as Sydney and Melbourne, and the formation of a complex Italian-Australian community that occurred in the 1960s. This chapter concludes by outlining the working and living circumstances and the cultural and social status of the numerous Italian working-class migrants and their families.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the history of the Italian-Australian Left between the middle of the 1940s and the late 1960s, that is, from the establishment of the anti-fascist organisation Italia Libera to that of the Lega Italo-Australiana. Common threads that link the former to the latter, and the organisations and their main missions that emerged and faded in between, are discussed.

Chapter Five contains a discussion of the circumstances that led to the establishment in 1971 of the PCI in Australia with the formation of the Australian Independent PCI Federation (IPCIF), a loose federation of Italian communist party cells within the Italian-Australian community. It also touches on the Cold War climate and ideological factionalism, which negatively affected the development of these organisations within the community.

Within Part Two of the dissertation, Chapter Six presents a discussion of the circumstances that led to the establishment of the FILEF in Australia. In this chapter some of the activity areas that marked the activism of FILEF during the 1970s are examined: the launching of its periodical Nuovo Paese and its role in the Italian-language press; the controversial FILEF-FEC social survey that investigated the socio-economic conditions of the Italian families living in the Coburg-Brunswick area; the participation of FILEF in the federally-funded Welfare Rights Officer Program; and the pro-ALP initiatives in which
FILEF was involved during the Whitlam government and before and after the election of Giovanni Sgrò to the Victorian Parliament.

Chapter Seven presents an examination of the perception of FILEF within conservative quarters and of the reactions provoked by the so-called ‘Italian communists move in’ incident—a front-page article in *The Age* in April 1975 that sensationaly exposed the FILEF-PCI link and allegedly stirred up anti-communist hysteria. This chapter also recounts the federal funding cut episode of 1976.

In Chapter Eight, the Salemi deportation case is examined; a court case in which the FILEF activist found himself at the centre of a controversial dispute over its amnesty application. With the support of FILEF and the Australian Left, Salemi fought all the way to the High Court putting the Australian notion of ‘giving someone a fair go’ to a test. After almost two years, the court case ended with the deportation of Salemi, which left FILEF, as explained in the last Chapter Nine, without a pivotal organiser. In Chapter Nine, the effects of Salemi’s 1977 deportation on FILEF are discussed, in particular the breakdown of the alliance between the ‘young’ and ‘old’ factions within FILEF and the emergence of the PCI as leading actor in the Italian-Australia Left in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This dissertation also includes three appendices: a biography index of twenty-six FILEF and PCI members and collaborators, a chronology of events 1943-1980, which includes significant dates for the history of the Italian-Australian and the Australian Left, and a photographic appendix.

Given the limited time and resources at my disposal, this research project was never intended to cover the entire history (since 1972) of FILEF in Australia, or at least of the three main Australian branches of FILEF in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide. A self-evident and feasible option was to delineate a period and a circumscribed area on which to focus the study, hence the ‘controversial’ history of the Melbourne branch during 1970s was singled out. The reasons behind this choice I shall explain in the next chapter.

Notes to Introduction

1 Translated by the author (herein translations by the author, unless specified).

4 A typical example of this, within the Italian-Australian community, was the pressure FILEF once exerted on Italian consulates to abide by 1967 Italian legislation, which aimed for a greater level of participation of Italian migrants in the decision-making processes concerning the funding by the Italian government of education and welfare activities. This legislation was aimed at reforming Italian consulates around the world by establishing consultative committees for the administration of migrant affairs and funding. In Australia, the implementation of this legislation was delayed for more than a decade, according to FILEF activist Renato Licata (see R. Licata, ‘Comitato unitario e comitati consolari’, paper no. 2 delivered at the First FILEF National Congress, October 1977, FMA).

5 For instance, ALP politicians Giovanni Sgrò, Carlo Carli and Joe Caputo (who became Mayor of Coburg and lately Moreland City Councillor), and people like Stefano de Pieri, who played an important role as multicultural advisor to the Victorian state minister Peter Spyker in the 1980s before becoming an Australian celebrity chef and a passionate campaigner on environmental and regional issues (Jane Faulkner, ‘Passion without puff’, The Age, 24 November 2003.) Other FILEF members and collaborators forged their professional careers, for instance, in Australia’s academia; people like language and literacy education professor Joe Lo Bianco of Melbourne University, Italian lecturer Mirna Cicioni of Monash University, and the late Franco Schiavoni, who was editorial board member of the journal Thesis Eleven, and chairperson of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission (renamed Victorian Multicultural Commission in 1996).
Chapter 1
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, a research framework to this dissertation is outlined. Firstly, the chapter explores the theoretical context in which the historical experience of FILEF’s grassroots activism is set. Secondly, it reviews the studies that have researched the history of FILEF Melbourne over the last three decades. Thirdly, it outlines the research strategy and methodology underpinning this dissertation. Lastly, it lists the types of primary and secondary sources used throughout the research.

Theoretical context

One of the challenges faced in the course of this research was that of theoretically contextualising the FILEF Melbourne experience that is the historical experience of FILEF’s grassroots activism during the politically ‘turbulent’ period of 1970s Australia. To be able to exhaustively answer the questions underpinning this research (see Introduction) it seemed appropriate, first and foremost, to place the FILEF Melbourne historical experience against a background of conceptual developments across the fields of study dealing with immigrant labour activism.

As an introductory note, it should be stressed that the social, political, and cultural activities that immigrant workers struggled to bring about in immigrant-receiving societies and their labour movements during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries happened against a background of processes such as class formation, nation building, and national identity, taking place in both the host and the mother countries’ economic and social structures. In their noteworthy work of scholarship, labour historians Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli (2001) offer a collection of essays describing analogous Italian immigrant worker
experiences that occurred in different historical periods and were set in quite different environments and contexts. From an international, global perspective they explore the consequences of the comings and goings, in Europe and the Americas and before and after the Second World War, of Italians whose diaspora “constitutes an ideal case study for anyone interested in how migration can transform identities and influence other historical processes, such as the rise of multiethnic states and the formation of classes” (DiGirolamo 2003). In their study, Gabaccia and Ottanelli underscore in particular the importance of the process of nation building in countries in which “Italy’s migrants pioneered a surprising range of transnational, multiethnic, and multiracial organising strategies that transcended ethnic and national divisions” (Gabaccia and Ottanelli 2001: 3). Ultimately, it was the labour movements in countries such as France, Latin America, and the United States which “played important roles in defining how foreigners would find incorporation into these multiethnic nations as workers and as citizens” (ibid.).

Immigrant workers often found themselves in the position of belonging to “racist and xenophobic mainstream labour movement[s, which for long] did not encourage multiethnic mingling” (Gabaccia and Ottanelli 2001: 11). As the vast majority of pre- and post-Second World War immigrant workers entered the labour force in advanced industrial countries at the very bottom, “…within the confines set by the world economy, the state, and the structure of work, immigrant workers face the challenge of defending their interests in competition with other groups holding power in society” (Guerin-Gonzales and Strikwerda 1993: 22).

In their edited study on labour activism and migration (1993), labour historians Camille Guerin-Gonzales and Carl Strikwerda point out that immigrant workers have been perceived in most of their host countries as politically controversial as much as economically crucial. It is a perception that has affected immigrant workers throughout historic periods and across continents, whether they were exploited immigrant workers in New England’s textile industry in the 1910s, undocumented Mexican workers in rural California in the 1920s and 1930s, Turkish guest workers in German auto plants, or Italian labourers in Melbourne’s textile and manufacturing factories in the 1960s and 1970s (Guerin-Gonzales and Strikwerda 1993: 3).

Like the vast majority of post-war immigrant workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds who settled in Australia, Italian-Australians too first entered the Australian
labour market at the lowest point and in typically labour-intensive industries, such as manufacturing and construction (Panucci, Kelly, and Castles 1992: 57). The labour market into which Italian-Australians entered was well segmented not only by industrial conflict between native workers and employers, but also along ethnic lines, as documented by Constance Lever-Tracey and Michael Quinlan in *A Divided Working Class* (1988).

The presence of immigrant workers in labour markets in which native workers dominated typically aroused deep-rooted fears about threats to jobs and salaries, disruption of the social order, and the weakening of labour and trade movements. A classic instance of Australian immigrant labour history in which fear and suspicion between native and immigrant workers produced social conflict amid the former group and distrust by the authorities, is that of the 1925 Royal Commission to investigate the social and economic effects of the increase in the number of aliens in North Queensland, known as the Ferri Report, which “arose out of the low wages and poor conditions that Italian workers accepted” (Collins 1992: 75).

Yet it was the presence of politically minded immigrant workers in working class organisations and native labour movements, crucially important for class solidarity and class consciousness amid fellow immigrant workers, which aroused even more deep-rooted fears and was even more dangerously radical in the eyes of local authorities and society than the presence of immigrants alone. American historian Michael Miller Topp draws attention to the fact that on the occasion of the Lawrence strike of 1912 (Massachusetts, United States) – during which some twenty thousand immigrant textile mill workers, many of whom of Italian origin, struck for weeks demanding (and later in part achieving) a wage increase, a fifty-four-hour working week, abolition of the premium and bonus system, double pay for overtime, and no recriminations against those who struck – “terrified nativists […] feared immigrants more as radicals then as wage depressers” (Topp 2001: 139).

The potentials and limits of left-wing immigrant Italian labour activism in early-twentieth-century American society and its labour movement are explored in the works of, for instance, Michael Miller Topp, with his study on Italian American transnationalists, and Italian historian Elisabetta Vezzosi, with her study on Italian Socialist leaders acting as radical ethnic brokers between ethnic community and larger society (Vezzosi 2001). These two studies shed light on experiences of immigrant labour activism that need to be taken into consideration when analysing the potentials of and limits to a CALD lobby organization.
Topp illustrates the extraordinary achievements gained by Italian syndicalists at the time of the Lawrence strike of 1910, which also represented “the high point of immigrant women’s activism, as well as a successful example of multiethnic collaboration under Italian leadership” (Gabaccia and Ottanelli 2001: 10). Yet the course of Italian American syndicalism quickly moved towards a different direction, when it reacted with violence and with a rhetoric based on national pride when accused of being anti-American by nativist Americans (ibid.). Vezzosi describes how Italian Socialists sought both to shape class consciousness and to foster an Italian cultural identity among fellow Italian migrants, while at the same time promoting a process of Americanisation by encouraging migrants to join the American Socialist Party.

These two studies suggest that “in the long run […] Italian American radical and working-class activists failed in their challenge to more conservative, nationalists brokers who after a few years later [in the 1920s] would help make Mussolini a popular figure among Italian American migrants” (Gabaccia and Ottanelli 2001: 10). Eventually, anti-fascism would glue together the most class-conscious Italian migrants and would serve as a bridge between Italy and the labour movements of the countries of the countries where they worked (Gabaccia and Ottanelli 2001: 12).

In a similar fashion, FILEF (and the PCI) did attempt to gather, under the same political and ideological umbrella, working-class, politically minded Italians in Australia, who sought to retain their political and cultural traditions while mingling to various degrees in the Australian ethnic rights, labour, and trade union movements and in mainstream politics. Yet it failed to significantly shape the Italian Australian ethnic identity through the activism of its ethnic brokers, leaving room for more conservative ethnic brokers to shape the course of the national identity of the ethnic community and to liaison with mainstream Australian institutions (e.g. COASIT, Il Globo).

Theoretically contextualising the FILEF Melbourne experience also means to adopt a typology of immigrant working-class organisation which seems appropriate in relation to FILEF. In their book *A Divided Working Class: Ethnic Segmentation and Industrial Conflict in Australia* (1988) Australian sociologist Constance Lever-Tracy and labour historian Michael Quinlan look into post-war interactions of immigrants with working-class
organisations in Australia by examining the diverse organisational options open to immigrants and their involvement in them (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 117-166).

In examining these organisational options Lever-Tracy and Quinlan identified three possible types: the ‘spontaneous groups’, the ‘separate immigrant union’, and the ethno-specific ‘immigrant worker clubs’. If the spontaneous groups or loose collective alliances, “often of a temporarily and informal nature”, formed within hostel immigrant centres and sought “to influence, through petition and protest, matters which are of general concern to Australia’s trade unions” (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 118-19), the separate immigrant union remained a potential never fully realised in Australia, and abhorred by native unions. It is the description of ethno-specific immigrant worker clubs, which Lever-Tracy and Quinlan classify as bodies which laid no claim to union status, and whose raison d’être was rather that of providing a political and cultural focal point for immigrant workers, which seems to fit best the organisational structure of FILEF:

They have acted […] as a catalyst by which relatively poorly integrated immigrant workers could be converted into active union members. These bodies were also a focus for shared cultural, ideological and social values among particular groups of immigrants. They facilitated the exchange of ideas and experiences, and the provision of social outlets and welfare services on a self-helped basis (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 151).

FILEF formed in a period in which similar immigrant worker clubs were being established among other ethnic communities, e.g. the Greek community (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 151-153).

History of FILEF in previous publications

Hitherto, there have not been any monographs, theses, or comprehensive critical essays on the history of FILEF Melbourne along the lines of, for instance, the MA thesis of Graham Marsh (1983), An historical and sociological study of the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS), or Michele Langfield’s volume (1996), Espresso bar to EMC: a thirty-year history of the Ecumenical Migration Centre2. Although a thoroughly researched history of FILEF
Melbourne (indeed of FILEF Australia) is yet to be undertaken, over the last three decades some have documented and analysed FILEF Melbourne’s history, or at least parts of it. Such history(ies) can be found embedded in several studies and constitute an important source of information to this thesis. More than any other, it need to be stressed, the works of Carlo Carli (1982) and Mark Lopez (2000) have played an important role in the investigation of FILEF Melbourne’s history.

By the time he submitted his honours thesis, Carli was a young former activist of FILEF Melbourne. He had left the organisation approximately one year earlier, in 1981. His formal quitting from FILEF Melbourne happened around the time a fellow FILEF Melbourne activist, Joe Caputo, was expelled from the organisation’s steering executive as the result of internal political tensions and power struggles, and whose expulsion had sent a message of dejection to activists like Carli. Although his short-lived experience in FILEF Melbourne (three years), he had first-hand and inside knowledge of it. In his thesis, while examining the post-war political scene within the Italian-Australian community of Melbourne, he recounted several otherwise undocumented episodes of FILEF Melbourne’s history, such as the close ties of FILEF Melbourne with the Australian branch of the PCI and the effects of Salemi’s deportation on the organisational structure.

Carli placed FILEF Melbourne’s history into this context: the traditional, conservative leadership of the Italian-Australian community, which had consolidated its hegemony during the post-war years, saw itself progressively challenged during the period of the Whitlam Labor government (1972-1975) by community vanguard organisations, namely FILEF. Immediately before and after the Fraser Liberal government took office (1975-1983), FILEF began to suffer a number of political and structural setbacks, including cuts in federal funding and the forced deportation of one of its key activists, Ignazio Salemi, who was both a prominent FILEF organiser and an Italian Communist Party (PCI) official. The Salemi court-political case, deportation included, created a division inside FILEF between what Carli defined as the ‘young’ and the ‘old’ faction; the former “wanted to use FILEF as a broad coordinating organisation for different initiatives” (Carli 1982: 51), while the latter, headed by FILEF secretary Giovanni Sgrò and the PCI group within FILEF “wanted to build a tight organisation that would maintain a dialogue with Australian political parties” (ibid.). The latter faction prevailed, “leaving FILEF as an isolated political sect” (ibid.). Plagued by lack
of funding and internal growing factionalism, Carlo concluded that FILEF Melbourne rapidly reduced its influence in the ethnic and Australian scene by the early 1980s.

Carlo’s main argument is centred on the conservative nature of the multicultural model matured around the second half of the 1970s and articulated in the policy guidelines of the 1978 Galbally Report, which according to Carlo supported rather than questioned the influence of the post-war middle-class leaders of the Italian-Australian community of Melbourne that FILEF had challenged. Carlo eventually argued (this is an interesting observation) that Fraser’s model of multiculturalism helped block structural and generational change even within the progressive migrant organisations, such as FILEF Melbourne, that had emerged in the onset of the multicultural era.

When researching for his thesis, Carlo saw, as he recently has pointed out, historical similarities between FILEF Melbourne and the Italian-Australian anti-fascist movement of the 1930s. Both were emerging vanguard movements within the Italian-Australian Left, and both had “a strong bohemian component” mainly composed of “city people” who managed to generate “a surge of activities”4. Likewise both movements suffered political and organisational setbacks and collapsed, restoring the community leadership once again to the notabili (‘notables’, that is, members of the establishment), consisting mainly of businesspeople and fairly ‘apolitical types’5.

Notwithstanding Carlo’s contribution to the local Italian-Australian historiography, his dissertation is open to question at a methodological level. He failed to acknowledge that he once belonged to FILEF’s ‘young faction’, and that his strained relationship with the FILEF Melbourne leadership of the time, in particular with its secretary Giovanni Sgro, had prevented him from accessing primary sources, which made the oral testimonies of sixteen people, mainly past and existing FILEF members and collaborators, essential to help him clarify issues and events. Carlo failed to acknowledge in the main text or in the footnotes this source which would have been essential for the reconstruction of FILEF Melbourne’s history. In the absence of a basic formalisation of Carlo’s oral history sources it is impossible to discern who contributes what information and to appreciate each person’s contribution to Carlo’s construction of FILEF Melbourne history. None the less, Carlo’s contribution to the literature remains significant. He contextualized the history of FILEF Melbourne by anchoring it to the broader historical framework of post-war Italian-Australian political...
activism, and in so doing, he continued the trend of investigation started by historian Cresciani (1980).

Another study which also recounts some episodes of the history of FILEF Melbourne is Lopez’s comprehensive study (2000) on the origins of multiculturalism in Australian politics up until 1972. Lopez discussed FILEF Melbourne within the context of the history of the migrant rights’ movement. Unlike Carli, he had the opportunity to access FILEF files and to gather recollections of Giovanni Sgrò (ibid.: 30, 532). Lopez constructed the following narrative of FILEF Melbourne’s: FILEF formed in Melbourne in 1972 with the key support of the Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre (FEC) and for the willingness of local Labor Party activist Giovanni Sgrò who was eager to draw “working-class Italians away from the Comitato Assistenza Italiani (COASIT), an organisation he regarded as an ideological enemy that provided an obstacle to the Italian migrants supporting the political left” (Lopez 2000: 149).

Unlike other migrant organisations, such as the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) and the Greek Professionals Association (GPF), FILEF Melbourne was according to Lopez a self-confessed working-class and Marxist-oriented organisation. Influenced by FEC activists Des Storer and Arthur Faulkner, FILEF Melbourne adopted an ethnic rights approach, which resulted during the Whitlam government, through the effective lobbyism of its activists, first and foremost Sgrò, in attracting government funding and access to ethnic-language media.

The arrival of Salemi in 1974, boosted FILEF Melbourne’s activities; but also created frictions between him and Sgrò (Lopez 2000: 328). Lopez argued that Salemi’s presence in Australia led to resounding incidents such as the ‘Italian communists move in’ of April 1975, that resonated heavily in the media of the time (The Age sensationally revealed the FILEF-PCI ‘red’ link) (ibid.: 403-4). Lopez commented: “The Salemi scandal singled FILEF out to Liberal politicians, otherwise favourably disposed towards ethnic organisations, as an example of what they considered to be an undesirable organisation. MacKellar resolved to deport Salemi as soon as his visa expired […]” (ibid.: 404). Lopez took FILEF Melbourne as an example of how politically one-sided organisations suffered setbacks following a change of government, unlike others, such as the AGWS which has established connections with both major political parties (ibid.).

Given the divergent source material of Carli and Lopez, it is striking to note the ways in which both respectively recall the same episodes of FILEF Melbourne’s history. Their
readings of a number of episodes, in particular the establishment of FILEF Melbourne and the ‘Italian communists move in’ incident, diverge markedly. On the establishment of FILEF in Melbourne, Lopez wrote:

[…] In 1972 the ethnic rights activists at the FEC were also involved in the establishment of an Italian ethnic organisation. They regarded COASIT as right-wing and conservative, and were interested in establishing a left-wing Italian organisation to challenge the position of COASIT in the Italian community. Storer and others were sceptical about their chances of achieving this until they met Giovanni Sgrò. […] When Sgrò visited the FEC, Faulkner and Storer were impressed by his enthusiasm. Sgrò told them he had organised a group of Italians to meet regularly at his home under the banner of FILEF […] an association that had been established in Europe by the PCI […] to care for Italian workers and their families in foreign countries. Sgrò had established a FILEF branch as an outlet to express his Marxist philosophy that was not available to him in the ALP, and to organise migrant workers (Lopez 2000: 148-49).

Carli’s account places the establishment of FILEF in the context of Melbourne’s Italian-Australian left-wing politics of the time, which saw the emerging of Australian PCI branches:

By the late sixties the organised Italian Left was reduced to an isolated and divided Italo-Australian League which posed no serious threat to the hegemony of the right [in the Italian-Australian community]. This decline of the Italo-Australian League partly followed the fortunes of the CPA[…] When a further division occurred between the CPA and its pro-Soviet wing, the Italian communists further distanced themselves and in 1971 formed an Australian branch of the PCI […] Then in 1972 another organisation was set up in Melbourne which clearly overlapped with the formation of the PCI branch. It was FILEF which was a Rome-based, international body with branches in the major regions of Italian migration. FILEF aimed to unite migrant workers to work for their human and civil rights. It was also largely a PCI influenced organisation. When it was set up in Melbourne the newly formed PCI branch served as its initial mass base, although non-communists were also involved in its formation (Carli 1982: 21-22).

Lopez interpreted the ‘Italian communists move in’ episode within the context of some existing friction between Sgrò and Salemi, stemming from Salemi’s manner of organising and co-ordinating activities:
[Salemi] was active in attempting to organise the Italian community around FILEF and, as Sgrò recalled, he often acted on his initiative without Sgrò’s authority: ‘Salemi got too big [for his] boots, a bit too big for himself. He used to [...] go on radio, or whatever, and write anything without consulting the bloody FILEF Committee; and I said to FILEF in Rome, he must go’. Salemi spoke candidly to The Age about his activities and precipitated a public relations disaster for FILEF. On 26 April 1975, The Age presented a front-page exposé on Salemi and FILEF, highlighting his status as an employee of the PCI and that FILEF received a Welfare Rights Officer grant from the federal Government. The report created a scandal, forcing Sgrò to make mainstream media appearances to attempt to contain the damage caused by the sensationalisation of FILEF’s Communist connections (Lopez 2000: 403-4).

Conversely, Carli placed the abovementioned episode within the tense climate generated by the publication in Nuovo Paese (02/02/1975; see also Storer 1979) of the findings of a social survey, carried out in 1974 by FILEF Melbourne in conjunction with the FEC, among 400 Italian migrant families in the then working-class area of Coburg-Brunswick and titled, Gli italiani in Australia. The findings undermined a common belief in the good, or at least above-average, living conditions of the Italian migrants ‘in Australia’, suggesting instead that, overall, Italian-Australians were economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged and discriminated against when compared to the Australian population. The findings were tabled in Italy at the First World Conference on Italian Immigration, held in Rome and sponsored by the Italian Foreign Office in late February 1975. In Melbourne, the Conference set off “a real power key [sic.]” (Carli 1982: 34) and infuriated the Italian-Australian establishment.

[Then] on the 26th April, 1975 The Age published an article entitled ‘Italian communists move in’. Now the article itself was not particularly anti-communist, as it spelt out some of the activities of FILEF, claimed that it was trying to win the support of the Italian community and accurately stated that Salemi was a member of the PCI. Yet for a reason that has never been explained a sensationalist headline was placed over the article, which made it sound as though the Italian communist party was making a bid to gain political control of Melbourne’s 250,000 strong Italian community (Carli 1982: 37-38).
If Carli’s thesis reflects the standpoint of the FILEF Melbourne’s ‘young faction’, Lopez’s exquisitely represents that of Sgrò, and this leads him to emphasize the role of Sgrò with the risk of shadowing that other activists played within the organisational structure.

Besides Carli and Lopez’s studies on the history of FILEF Melbourne, aspects of such history (including other branches of FILEF in Australia) are reviewed in worth mentioning works of scholarship. For instance, Jakubowicz et al. (1984: 62-63) laid emphasis on the fact that FILEF Melbourne was essentially a working-class based and Marxist-oriented organisation which provided in the emerging ethnic welfare sector of the mid-1970s Melbourne an alternative to COASIT, which up until 1972 represented the main response to the welfare needs of Italian immigrants and was the organization preferred by the conservative governments. Unlike COASIT, Jakubowicz et al. also highlighted, FILEF combined community work with political demands through a grassroots approach. By training organisers locally, FILEF hoped to “transfer the lessons of Italian [post-68] urban social movements to the Australian context” (ibid.: 63). For Jakubowicz et al. the deportation of Salemi could be read as the denouement of the conflict of the two organisations (COASIT saw arguably its influential position in the Italian-Australian community challenged by FILEF) and the failure of FILEF Melbourne’s strategy of “aggressive advocacy of social and welfare rights” (ibid.: 81).

When looking into FILEF Melbourne’s history, immigrant historians Jupp and Cresciani drew attention to the actively controlling role played by the Australian authorities when dealing with ‘radical’ organisations and organisers. Jupp pointed out that “the refusal to subsidise the radical Italian organisation FILEF” in 1976 suggested that the government’s subsidising of ethnic welfare organisation could further or thwart pressure groups depending on their policy orientations (Jupp 1984c: 187). Cresciani (1985: 103) took the case of Salemi, who was deported “for political activities carried out as a leader of the pro-Communist FILEF”, as an example of how determined Australian authorities discouraged the roles assumed by “uncomfortably active left-wing Italians” (ibid.).

Political Economy practitioner Joseph Halevi’s Gramscian interpretation of the FILEF experience in Australia diverges from the preceding social- and political-historical analyses (Halevi 1989). Halevi precisely examined the cultural role played by FILEF in Australia. He refuted the social theorem that second and third generation migrants had “the conceptual
means to understand, assimilate, and indeed repossess, the original culture [of their parents or grandparents] in its contemporary dimension” (ibid.: 223). Following the Gramscian notion of culture, with its notion that a lack of education does not imply the absence of culture, he demonstrated that the not formally educated working class, to which many members of FILEF in Australia belonged, had the ability to organise itself in a modern way and find “a way out from the lower forms of culture which beset the everyday life of the uneducated, such as commonsense and religion” (ibid.: 224).

Some other studies on Australian multiculturalism touch on FILEF Melbourne only briefly. For instance, Jupp’s article on Italians and multicultural Australia (1989) contains a discussion of the channels through which Italian-Australians expressed their peculiar community demands, such as “maintenance of the Italian language and culture […] protection of wages and conditions of industrial workers” (ibid.: 25). Jupp listed, the newspapers, the Italian welfare organisations, “of which the largest and most effective is COASIT”, Catholic religious organisations and a “handful of Italian politicians such as Franca Arena or Con Sciaccia” (ibid.: 25). He only mentioned FILEF when acknowledging that Italian welfare organisations did not always “work together” and there had been “some rivalry between the radical FILEF and the more conservative COASIT” (ibid.: 25).

On the other hand, in some other studies the history of FILEF Melbourne (and in other Australian cities) and its activists is strikingly absent. Take for example the ground-breaking study on post-war migrants by Jean Martin, The Migrant Presence (1978): FILEF Melbourne’s activities in the welfare and trade union fields are totally ignored. Neither did FILEF Melbourne receive any mention in some minor publications, e.g. in an official bicentenary publication edited by Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien and translated into Italian by Laura Mecca (1988), the brief history of Italians in Australia features COASIT as the only Italian-Australian welfare agency.

Research strategy and methodology

Initially, my PhD project focused on the histories of Italian building and construction workers who had migrated to Australia in the post-war years – it was not my choice to write
a history of FILEF until in late 2001 I started thinking about FILEF’s history, when stories of FILEF’s past political and cultural activism were conveyed to me by some of my friends, who happened to be former members of FILEF’s Melbourne branch.

Preliminary background research made me realise that FILEF Melbourne’s history constituted a pivotal episode in Italian-Australian community politics that was worth researching, and that could provide significant insights into the political potentials and limits of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) lobbies in Australia (see Introduction). As explained in more detail in previous sections of this chapter, earlier attempts at writing (parts of) a history of FILEF Melbourne have not been adequately comprehensive. Its history has, for instance, rarely been viewed against a wider historical background that pays attention to earlier political developments of the Left in Italy and Australia. Primary sources necessary for writing a FILEF history appeared to be relatively abundant, yet many would not be available in a few decades, for these sources do not just include archival materials but recollections of FILEF members as well. Thus, in early 2002, I decided to change my research topic and to focus on FILEF’s history of the Melbourne branch.

Since the outset this research project presented challenging issues of methodology, practice, and ethics. For instance, it was not at all clear or obvious what chronological and geographical scope needed to be adopted in writing a history of FILEF. Would it best be a complete history of FILEF in Australia from its foundation (1972) to today, or had it better focus in detail on FILEF in, for instance, the 1970s, 1980s, and/or 1990s? Should it take the form of a history of one of the major FILEF sezioni (branches; e.g. FILEF Sydney), or should it include a discussion of minor or short-lived branches (e.g. FILEF Geelong)?

History practice also demanded some clarifications: which methodology was to be adopted? What historical perspective? Should I write, so to speak, a people’s history (i.e. with a relatively great emphasis on oral testimonies and life writing material), or an ‘official’ organisation history (i.e. putting more weight on official documents reflecting the public rendering of FILEF)? Would FILEF’s history be best understood if placed in the wider historical context of the Left in both Italy and Australia, or would it be best to historically situate it in the Australian ethnic rights movement and Australian socio-cultural context - or both?
Planning to gather recollections of surviving FILEF members posed its dilemmas too: who should be contacted and interviewed for the project? How many people should be interviewed? Should prospective interviewees be former or current FILEF member only, or should they include former or current FILEF collaborators, sympathisers and/or outsiders who played a role in the organisation’s structure? And how could the oral history material best be used and intertwined with the rest of the sources?

As the project progressed from its initial background-research phase I attempted to answer these questions. Initially, a history of FILEF in Australia from foundation to present seemed a feasible project within the given timeframe and with the available resources. The project would start in Melbourne, given that I was based in Melbourne and had easy my access to the local branch and people, and move on to other FILEF branches: Sydney, Adelaide, and ideally even Brisbane, Perth, and Canberra. However, the amount of material that could be taken into account and the extent of the analysis that could be done were intrinsically constrained by the timeframe and resources of a doctoral project, and in later stages of the project, the chronological and geographical scope of the project were narrowed down.

As explained in more detail below, the scope of the project was purposely narrowed down from ‘the history of FILEF in Australia since the 1970s’ to ‘the 1970s history of FILEF Melbourne’. It needs to be stressed that my choice to focus on FILEF Melbourne does not imply that the history of FILEF Sydney and FILEF Adelaide is not equally important for research purposes, especially for a thorough history of FILEF in Australia, but such a project will clearly have to be a longer-term aim. There were several reasons for the decision to limit the scope of the project to cover just the history of the Melbourne branch. First, Melbourne is where multicultural policies were first experimented with and implemented in the course of the 1970s (Lopez 2000: passim). Second, some pioneering ethno-specific lobby and welfare organizations of the period, including the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) and the Italian Welfare Committee (COASIT), were established in Melbourne, as was the first FILEF branch. The self-imposed chronological limitation to the 1970s was eventually prompted by the wealth of material available and the historical significance of that period (e.g. launch of Nuovo Paese and establishment of the welfare office, the Salemi case, the State election of Giovanni Sgrò). It quickly became apparent that the 1970s were an important decade in the
history of this FILEF branch, which deserves close attention. FILEF Melbourne activities and activists behind them in the 1970s were of a particular character that was worthy to be considered by themselves.

Methodologically speaking, I planned initially to approach the project in a way in which I could sensibly combined the use of both quantitative and qualitative data e.g. archival material and oral history testimonies. As the project progressed, with the literature being reviewed and the background research being conducted, the gathering and analysis of quantitative data took priority over the analysis (rather than the gathering) of the qualitative ones. The purpose was to establish, on the one hand, the amount and value of earlier studies and to gain, on the other hand, an understanding of the ‘hard data’ underlying these studies before proceeding with the study of the oral accounts collected. This may explain the fact that a large part of my dissertation is essentially based on literature and archival material. Since the onset, it was deemed appropriate to put a lot of emphasis on the need for thorough background research into what had already been said about FILEF and the historical contexts in which it operated. The main reason laid on the need to compare, and contrast the collective (essentially oral) and mainstream (primarily written) histories of FILEF Melbourne.

As just mentioned, the gathering of quantitative data ran in parallel with the gathering of qualitative ones. Since late 2001, contacts with current and former FILEF members and collaborators were established with the purpose of mapping, or at least beginning to map, the collective memory surrounding the history of FILEF Melbourne. This research strategy resulted in the compilation of a list of names of potential interviewees, and helped establish an atmosphere of open communication with former FILEF Melbourne associates’ – because open communication is relevant. It was by means of these initial contacts that I was introduced to other FILEF Melbourne associates, some of whom were subsequently interviewed. Having established the necessary contacts, the interviews were conducted; in the process of interviewing members of the first FILEF Melbourne generation (belonging to the 1950s and 1960s generations of migrants) were prioritized, as they were most vulnerable to the passing of time. People belonging to the 1970s generation of migrants, and those who worked with, for, or indirectly with the organisation, were also interviewed. In total, twenty-seven current and former FILEF members and collaborators, primarily of the Melbourne branch, were interviewed and their memories and views recorded. Many interviews were
conducted in the Italian language. Exceptions from some interviews formed then the basis for
the oral history contribution to this research.

Sources

In the preparation of this thesis extensive use was made of primary sources, which constitute
the main source of information on the history of FILEF Melbourne due to the scarcity of
secondary sources on the subject. As previously argued (see Introduction), post-war Italian-
Australian political history has been a neglected field of study (Cresciani 1988a: 55-56;
Rando 1973: 94-95, interview with Cresciani), and FILEF Melbourne’s history is no
exception. Yet, there seems to be no lack of primary sources. Archival data is abundant and
relatively accessible (with more record files held in public archives expected to be released
once the thirty-year access rule is no longer applicable), while a substantial number of
surviving ex-members and ex-collaborators of FILEF Melbourne could be traced for
consultation and interviewing. For these reasons, primary sources, such as letters, statements,
press releases, conference proceedings, leaflets, and interviews, form the main body of data
on which this study has relied.

Public and private collections\(^6\) in Australia, Italy, and United States hold a rich and
diverse set of epistolary and photographic data, conference proceedings and newspaper
clippings. During fieldwork trips to Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney, Modena, Rome, and New
York, a number of relevant record files and memorabilia were located that shed light on the
issues discussed in this dissertation. Some material is directly related to FILEF’s presence
and activity in Australia, while other material only touches on it briefly or indirectly.

Many of the records used in the construction of this history of FILEF were unearthed in
the most obvious place: the archive of FILEF Melbourne, located at the FILEF office in
Coburg. Apparently, scholars and researchers have occasionally consulted the FILEF
Melbourne Archive (FMA)\(^7\). The FMA comprises approximately two hundred and sixty
uncatalogued folders, one-tenth of which date back to the 1970s. It also includes an
incomplete set of *Nuovo Paese* editions from circa 1974 to 1983, and miscellaneous posters,
photos, videos, audiocassettes and films. Some of the organisation’s memorabilia are kept
there too: a red flag and a portrait of Lenin, supposedly painted by the late Tom Diele, a FILEF member himself and co-ordinator of the FILEF artistic group.

The FMA has not been formally catalogued, which made it necessary to carry out a preliminary survey in order to comprehend the location and significance of the various records. In the context of this project a systematic reading of a dozen ‘catalogued’ folders was conducted (those regarding the Salemi case, the 1974 and 1975 federal campaigns, *Nuovo Paese*, and the 1977 and 1980 FILEF national congresses). Cursory attention was paid to the remaining 1970s folders, which are concerned with, for example, the activities of the FILEF Youth and Women’s Groups, the transcriptions of the FILEF Italian-language radio programs produced and broadcast by ABC Access Radio Station 3ZZ, and the exchange of correspondence between FILEF Melbourne and the other Australian FILEF branches.

The ‘Salemi case’ folders contain an extraordinarily rich assortment of records. Besides newspaper clippings (one hundred and sixty-five news items derived from local and international papers), they contain letters exchanged between FILEF Melbourne and a number of organisations, including the Immigration Department; letters exchanged between the Immigration Department and Holding & Redlich, the legal firm defending Salemi; press and news releases by FILEF and others on its behalf; FILEF information bulletins; minutes; telegrams; letters to *Nuovo Paese*; posters; and materials that fall into a ‘miscellaneous’ category. These materials provided the opportunity for a comprehensive study of the Salemi court case and the political campaign that followed.

The folders regarding the 1974 and 1975 federal campaigns shed light on the support offered by FILEF in the re-election bid of the Labor Party in 1974, while those regarding the 1977 and 1980 FILEF national congress’ proceedings offered a snapshot of the several ‘fronts’ and debates in which FILEF was involved in the 1970s: debates about multiculturalism in Australian schools, the Italian Consular Committees, the role of *Nuovo Paese* in the press, female migrant workers, the relationship between migrants and trade unions, the Liberal governments’ strategies towards the migrant workers’ movement, and so on.

A second collection consulted in the context of this project is that held at the Italian Communist Party-Antonio Gramsci Institute Foundation in Rome (PCI-AGIF Collection). Although this material revealed a large amount of information about the history of the PCI in
Australia, it has also proven to be an excellent source of information on the history of FILEF in Australia. It needs to be said that the history of the PCI in Australia remains largely unknown among historians and scholars; apart from the links with FILEF’s history, the history of the PCI in Australia is absent from the literature. Research on the records from the *ufficio emigrazione* (Emigration Office) collection was limited to those that could potentially elucidate the nexus between FILEF and the PCI in the 1970s. Access was limited to those records dated before 1974, cause of the thirty-year restriction policy. Some forty records dated between 1970 and 1973—mainly letters, statistics and reports—were closely studied. By reconstructing the struggles of the Italian-Australian communists who established the PCI between 1971 and 1972, it has also been possible to shed new light on the origins of FILEF.

Additionally, other public collections yielded valuable material, part of which was used in this study. The FILEF New South Wales Collection preserves records of the early history of FILEF Sydney, from the early 1970s to 1985. Some of the records regarding the Salemi case were examined, with particular attention paid to those that were unavailable in Melbourne. Unfortunately, the FILEF Collection in Rome holds very few records regarding the organisation’s activities in the 1970s.

Private collections form an unexpectedly rich and significant data source used in this research. They were, in a sense, opened up as a by-product of the interviewing process, “a means of discovering written documents and photographs which would not have otherwise been traced” (Thompson 1998: 24). Many interviewees voluntarily made their private collections available for consultation. Many different kinds of materials are present in these private collections: letters, minutes’ drafts, newspaper clippings, posters and photographs. Subject to agreement with the interviewees, some of this material has been digitally duplicated, as its survival would have been compromised over the years.

As far as the oral history interviews are concerned, between April 2002 and May 2004, twenty-seven of them were conducted in agreement with the university’s ethics regime. Of these, thirteen were selected and transcribed; excepts from these thirteen interviews were later used for research purposes. Although partially used, this material forms a significant segment of the primary sources used.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 As both strike adherents and leaders, Italian immigrants and syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union played a central role in the multiethnic Lawrence strike (Topp 2001: 141).

2 While some historians of Italian-Australian studies have often tackled wide-ranging studies (see for example Pascoe 1987; Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987; Cresciani 2003), others have limited their research to specific areas. This is the case for example of the study of Giorgio Cheda (1976) on Swiss-Italians in nineteenth century Australia, the comparative study of Italian migrants in Sydney and Griffith by Rina Huber (1977), Lindsay Thompson’s work (1980) on a group of Italians that returned to Italy. However, these and other researches carried out their projects as part of historical enquiries, which did not strictly relate to migrant politics.

3 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

4 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

5 Ibid.

6 By ‘private collection’ I mean a body of written and photographic material held by a person or family in their own house, kindly lent to me for research purposes.

7 Lopez has consulted the ‘FILEF files’ for his study on the origins of multiculturalism in Australian politics (2000: 532).

8 Note that citations from the FMA quoted in this thesis appear only as ‘FMA’.

9 One reason for this gap in the literature could be the dispersion of primary sources. The transformation of the PCI into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) at the beginning of the 1990s, and eventually into the Democrats of the Left (DS), rapidly dissolved the structure and membership of the PCI in Australia. Records have been found during fieldwork for this research project, but apart from those in the PCI-AGIF Collection, they are almost exclusively in private hands. A ‘PCI Australia Collection’ is yet to be created.
Chapter 2
POST-WAR ITALIAN EMIGRATION AND ITS POLITICISING
BY THE LEFT

The establishment of FILEF in Italy in the late 1960s, and subsequently among several Italian communities around the world could be seen as an outcome of the politicising by the Left of post-war Italian emigration. This chapter reviews the circumstances which caused the expatriation and repatriation of millions of Italians mainly to and from western Europe, the Americas and Australia during economic reconstruction and rapid growth of the post-war period. Within this historical framework, it sets the critique of the Left towards the emigration policies of the Italian government, which exposed the far-from-rosy circumstances in which many Italians lived abroad and advocated policies aiming to reverse the emigration trend by means of creating employment opportunities in the economically under-developed regions of the country. It then examines the origins of FILEF and the thought of its promoter, Carlo Levi. Finally, it examines the case study of the PCI Emigration Office, which had close ties to FILEF, and the PCI’s activities overseas.

The revival of Italian mass emigration: data and analysis

During his opening speech at the 1975 World Conference on Italian Migration, Christian Democratic Party (DC) Prime Minister Aldo Moro underlined the dramatic extent of emigration: some thirty million Italians had thus far migrated overseas since unification in 1861—a figure that was comparable to the entire Italian urban population at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Inocenti 1978: v). More than half of these thirty million had emigrated before the First World War. Approximately six million were, at the time of Moro’s speech, still living and working overseas.¹
Italian emigration certainly was, in its magnitude and duration (it lasted approximately a century, from the 1860s to the early 1970s), one of the most significant socio-economic events occurring in contemporary Italy. Its implications for Italy’s growth and social structure have been extraordinary and complex (Rosoli 1978: passim; Ciuffoletti and Degl’Innocenti 1978, vol. 1 and 2). To comprehend how emigration has influenced the social and economic fabric of the country, in Sicily alone 38% of its population, or 1,703,000, moved away from the island between 1947 and 1961. Several provinces (i.e. Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna, Messina) halved their population due to emigration producing an incalculable socio-economic drain (Renda and Unione delle camere di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura della Regione siciliana. 1989: 8).

The size and the direction of the emigration flow has been very much influenced by a set of factors: the alternation of cycles of economic growth and economic downturn, the changing patterns of the labour markets, and the impact of immigration policies by Italy and the host countries (Monferrini 1987: 7). For instance, during the first decade of the twentieth century, the U.S.A. became the main destination outside Europe, receiving 36% of the overall emigration flow during the 1901-1905 period, and 41% in the following (1906-1910) period (Favero and Tassello 1978: 27). Some 3.5 million Italians migrated to North America (mainly the U.S.A.) between 1900 and 1915 (ibid.). The U.S. immigration policies of the period favoured a high quota of Italian newcomers into the country. Moreover, the lack of industrial development in southern Italy towards the end of the nineteenth century led to the failure of the rationalisation and mechanisation of the main agricultural sector. Thus the surplus of southerner labour, not employable by the local industry in what Francesco Cerase termed a “precarious economy”, turned to emigration (Cerase 1978: 122-35, 152).

Immediately after the end of the First World War, emigration of Italians reached pre-1915 levels, with some 900,000 expatriations in the 1919-1920 period only; more than half of these were to France and Switzerland (Favero and Tassello 1978: 30-31). On the other hand, the new Italian Fascist policy on emigration (1927), the U.S.A.’s revised immigration quotas for Italians (1924), and the Second World War restricted the emigration flow up to the mid-1940s.

Italians emigrated en masse, however, at the end of the Second World War too, with 200-300,000 departures and 65-119,000 repatriations yearly (Favero and Tassello 1978: 27). By
1951, some 1,420,000 Italians had already emigrated since 1946 (787,700 to Europe; 633,100 outside Europe), while 471,900 were repatriated (Favero and Lucrezio 1975: 39-40). Between 1956 and 1962, emigration reached record levels, with 344,802 expatriations in 1956, 341,793 in 1957, 383,908 in 1960, 387,123 in 1961, and 365,611 in 1962. Repatriations also recorded high levels, with an average of around 190,000 returns a year during the same period (Rosoli 1978: 347, 349).

Data on net emigration during the 1946-1970 period shows record numbers in the late 1940s (i.e. 139,000 in 1949), in the mid 1950s (i.e. 115,000 in 1955) and in the mid-1960s (i.e. 70,000 in 1966), before a consistent drop from 1968 onwards (Calvaruso et al. 1975: 22).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Expatriated</th>
<th>Repatriated</th>
<th>Net emigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946-1951</td>
<td>236,800</td>
<td>78,600</td>
<td>158,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-1957</td>
<td>289,400</td>
<td>124,100</td>
<td>165,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-1963</td>
<td>323,000</td>
<td>191,300</td>
<td>131,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1969</td>
<td>244,100</td>
<td>177,600</td>
<td>66,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>151,800</td>
<td>142,500</td>
<td>9,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>268,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>142,900</strong></td>
<td><strong>125,600</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Calvaruso et al. 1975: 8)

In a phase of economic reconstruction and rapid growth, during the period the so-called periodo della ricostruzione (reconstruction period, 1946-1951), western European countries (primarily Switzerland, France, and Germany) became the primary destinations for Italian migrants. They turned to the reserve of manpower located in the underdeveloped regions of southern Europe to meet production demands (Volpe 1980a: 44).

The labour markets of Western European countries opened for foreign unemployed labourers, as the new political circumstances of the European continent (which prompted the signing in 1957 of the Treaty of Rome, the mainstay of today’s European Union) improved co-operation among western countries in matters such as workers’ mobility and the cross-border traffic of people (ibid.).
Such economic circumstances favoured the flow of an impressive number of unemployed and under-employed Italians: the period between 1946 and 1976 saw 7.3 million expatriations and 4.3 million repatriations of Italian citizens (Favero and Tassello 1978: 37). Note that in 1975 repatriations outnumbered expatriations for the first time, with a ratio of 123:100, while in 1970-74, the ratio was 93:100 (ibid.: 12). Approximately two thirds of the emigrant flow went towards Europe, while the remaining third directed to North and South America (80%), Australia (16%), Africa (4%), and Asia (1%) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Recipient countries of the Italian immigration flows, 1946-1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total number of Italian immigrants received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2,330,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,137,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,032,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>500,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>488,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>440,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg)</td>
<td>381,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>360,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>260,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>166,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>124,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>88,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>13,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,286,052</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Favero et al. 1978: 39)

The dynamics of the 1950s reconstruction boom in western Europe, including some areas of Italy, and the massive drain of manpower from the agricultural sector favoured occupational mobility and emigration from the underdeveloped Mezzogiorno and Trevenezie, both overseas and, within the country, toward the triangolo industriale (industrial triangle) between Turin, Milan, and Genoa (Favero and Lucrezio 1975: 41). It is during this period of economic take-off of 1952-1957 that the net overseas emigration reached its peak throughout the 1946-1970 period, with 992,000 permanent departures (Favero and Lucrezio 1975: 75). During this period Italians who emigrated outside Europe favoured North America (35%, up
from 18%) and Australia (16%, up from 7%) rather than South America (45%, down from 69%), when compared with the previous six-year period.

Mass emigration was also triggered by the Italian government’s economic, employment and emigration policies of the time, which played a crucial role in encouraging emigration of large numbers of Italians from the South and Northeast.

The Italian governments of the 1940s and 1950s eagerly supported a policy of emigration that deemed individual or collective emigration a suitable solution to the high level of unemployment (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 280). As the post-war economic and industrial reconstruction boom primarily progressed in the triangolo industriale of Italy, while it remained marginal elsewhere, the relative underdevelopment of the South perpetuated its precarious economy of the late 19th century into the 1950s. The under-industrialisation of the southern areas resulted in a surplus of local labour, with many people facing the dilemma of returning to agricultural work or migrating.

In 1948, the Italian government reported that there were some 832,000 prospective migrants over a four-year period (Volpe 1979a: 36). A confidential government report dated March 1949—which contained data and projections of the migration flows up until 1952—unveiled a much higher target: approximately four million people were regarded “in excess”, of whom two million were officially unemployed (Sacchetti 1978: 260; Favero and Lucrezio 1975: 36-37).

A migrant recipient country such as Australia seems to have been well-aware of the Italian government’s intentions, when in November 1950, Labor MP Kim E. Beazley suggested to the Minister of Immigration Harold Holt to consider the immigration of Italian stonemasons and quarry workers to Australia, given that the Italian Government wanted “to get rid of 250,000 people a year”.

The Italian government’s ten-year plan for the development of employment and wealth (the so-called Piano Vanoni) of 1954, when departures reached record levels, considered a high number of yearly departures of Italian workers to overseas countries to be one of the key strategies in the fight against unemployment (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 282).

Emigration reached dramatic levels in the 1950s and well into the 1960s, and the bulk of post-war migrants came indeed from southern regions. It has been calculated that some 1.8
A typical example of a southerner migrating to make a better living was Giovanni Sgrò. He grew up in a peasant family in the small town of Seminara in the Calabrian countryside of Reggio Calabria, and migrated to Australia in 1952. His memoirs tell of the devastating impact of emigration in the South, which “after the Second World War emptied the town [of Seminara] of many young people and much of the countryside became abandoned” (Sgrò 2002: 1).

The vicissitudes to which another southerner, Vincenzo Mammoliti, was subjected when migrating from countryside Calabria to Australia in 1951 may well embody the archetypal experience of the southern Italian migrant of this period. In the 1940s, Mammoliti worked as a farm labourer in a large landed estate. However, the partially failed post-war attempts of the government to reform the agricultural sector, and the unsuccessful, short-lived peasant movement of the *occupazione delle terre* (occupation of former common land), had reduced the work prospects for young southerners. Many of them resorted to emigration to escape, in Mammoliti’s words, from the clutches of local barons and their farm managers who actually dominated their employees’ and subordinates’ life decisions. Of his own personal experience, Mammoliti recalled:

*Un giorno il zio del barone, don Franco il proprietario m’ha detto: “Quando ti sposi?”*. Dico: “Fra breve”. “Cesare ti aiuterà”, che era il barone, perché il fascismo ogni trenta ettari di terra gli aveva fatto una palazzina gratis e c’erano tante di quelle palazzine vuote. E allora quando gliel’ho detto, m’ha detto che mi dava la risposta. È venuto una settimana dopo e mi dice: “Sai Peppe u Pazzu—che era il soprannome di un guardiano—ha detto che dobbiamo metterci il grano...”. Quando gli ho dato l’ultimo giorno di lavoro, gli ho fatto ancora una settimana: “Guarda che io vado in Australia”. “Ma sai, li, che vai a fare, non c’è nulla, poca gente, pecore, bee, muu: ti fanno la testa così”. Gli ho detto: “Sì, sì, forse è vero ma perlomeno non c’è Peppe u Pazzu, no?”; non c’è il guardiano. È rimasto. Io ero contadino con la scuola elementare non dovevo arrivare a dirci quelle cose a lui. Lui era barone.
The struggles of migrants like Sgrò and Mammoliti, who represented the weakest and largest link in the chain of emigration during the post-war period, namely the working-class and peasant component, became a matter of concern for the Italian Left from the 1950s onwards.

When the emigration flows reached record high levels, the voices most critical of the government policy on emigration within the Italian Left came indeed from the South, the region where the socio-economic consequences of emigration (depopulation and economic underdevelopment) were most severe. Giorgio Napolitano of the PCI publicly doubted the main argument of the government’s emigration policy, which claimed that the surplus of population rather than the discrepancy between the socio-economic conditions of the different classes within Italian society and the partial failure of industrialisation and agricultural reforms in the South was causing mass emigration (Napolitano 1954, from Ciuffoletti et al.: 295).

For Napolitano, the solution to stemming the tide of mass emigration from the rural South lay in the completion of the agricultural reform, in the formulation of fair collective agreements for farm labourers, and in industrialisation, rather than ‘colonisation’ by the private enterprise of the industrialised North (Napolitano 1954, from Ciuffoletti et al.: 296).

Emigration: a political and politicised issue

In the late nineteenth century, Italy’s political class tolerated the fact that soaring number of Italians emigrated every year without being adequately protected by legislative measures against profiteers and exploiting entrepreneurs. Bipartisanly, it shared the view that emigration was somewhat inevitable and irretrievable. The political answer of the time to the alarming phenomenon revolved around control measures for managing the emigration flow (see, for instance, the government’s emigration policy of 1901 and the creation of the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione (General Commissariat of Emigration) rather than solving the causes that provoked it. Mass emigration was set in the political debate of the country’s land reform and the Southern regions’ economic development. In his 1877-1884 inquests into the state of affairs of the agricultural sector in Italy, statesman and economist Stefano Jacini concluded that a land reform, with emphasis in technological
development hence an outflow of farm hand labourers to balance the uneven demographics in the countryside, was badly needed. Jacini viewed emigration, as economic historian Ercole Sori put it, as ‘un volano da far agire in una fase di riorganizzazione agricola [e un mezzo] per temperar[e] la asprezze sociali’ (a driving force for the technological restructuring of the agricultural sector and a way for softening social frictions) (Sori 1983: 25).

In the early days of mass emigration, the lack of attention of the Italian political establishment left the door open for Catholic and Socialist movements to create their own emigration policies, agendas, and organisations. Italian Catholic movements focused on the spiritual and material care of Italian immigrants. The Scalabrinian fathers, for example, emigrated along with Italian immigrants and encouraged them to maintain their Catholic heritage, values and education, as well as the culture of the country they left behind, knowing that faith was not possible to flourish without fostering culture too. In a time of tension between Church and State in Italy, Piacenza bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, the founder of the Scalabrinian movement, saw the opportunity Italian migration offered to the Church for the reconciliation of religion and country, taking charge of an Italian issue involving both Church and State (Tomasi 1983: 146-147).

Another Catholic-based movement that assisted Italian immigrants, the Opera Bonomelli, aspired to harmonise the concepts of religion and patria (fatherland) in the assumption to modernise the Church and offer to modern Christians modern tools to comprehend better modern life’s adversities (Rosoli 1983: 166-167). For its founder, Cremona bishop Geremia Bonomelli, the Opera Bonomelli ought to bring religious, moral, and material comfort to the Italian immigrants, as well as to defend them against the wave of Socialist ideas and organisations that were spreading among and around Italian communities abroad (ibid.: passim).

Socialists chiefly looked at emigration from a class struggle point of view. Emigration not only deprived temporarily or permanently the Italian workforce of large numbers of sound workers, but it also compromised the emerging influence of the Italian working class as a whole by fragmentising its rank and files and lessening the sowing of revolutionary class-consciousness. Well-known socialists like Angiolo Cabrini7, the founder of the first Camera del Lavoro (Trade Union Council) in Italy and a promoter of the first Italian workers organisations in Switzerland, and Antonio Labriola, the father of Marxism in Italy, elaborated
thorough studies and innovative legislative proposals on the emigration issue. At the turn of the century, Italian Socialists were actively involved in establishing progressive newspapers among Italian migrant communities in France, Switzerland, and Germany (Ciuffoletti 1983: 207).

Emigration began to be considered an important item in Italian political parties’ agendas from the mid-late 1960s onwards. Up to the 1950s, in fact, emigration was still a marginal issue for both the ruling Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the left-wing opposition, and was seen as a safety valve for the release of pressure building up as a result of the unevenness of the socio-economic structure of the country.

In a paper delivered at the third national DC congress (Venice 1949) Christian Democrat MP Mariano Rumor affirmed that emigration was a vital necessity for Italy and that a policy of permanent emigration was to be highly encouraged. As more than half a century before, such a phenomenon was considered to be inevitable, as a high unemployment rate was thought to be congenital to the Italian economic situation on the basis of the country’s lack of mineral wealth and capital, and its population surplus (Rumor 1959, from Ciuffoletti et al. 235).

Rumor’s line of reasoning followed that of DC Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, whose vision of emigration was free-trade-inspired and neo-colonial, which let Italian migrants be subordinated to the market demands that regulated the availability and mobility of migrant manpower in Western Europe and overseas. Welfare assistance was – as it occurred in the past – limited to religious and philanthropic organisations, with very little involvement by the government. De Gasperi, who was also in the 1950s ad interim Minister of Italy’s former colonies in Africa wished to boost emigration of Italians towards those territories. His opinion, Italian settlers could represent a bridgehead for possible economic penetration for Italian enterprise in what were thought to be booming countries (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 230-2), as well as strengthening the balance of the country’s foreign payments with their remittances (ibid.).

In the 1950s, the Italian Left fundamentally backed the emigration policy of the government. It justified it by referring to the need for thousands of unemployed to make a living, and to the requirement of the government to find a way to lighten the unemployment pressure (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 260). Yet, it advocated an internationalist
rather than a liberal approach to the issue of emigration and immigrant mobility by promoting a closer collaboration among nations involved in the emigration issue. Moreover, the Italian Left questioned any possible exploitation of migrant labour the government’s policy did not help eradicate. At the time, the issue of migrant labour’s exploitation was a particular serious one, which struck a sensitive chord in the left-wing ranks.

In 1948, PCI parliamentarian Antonio Giolitti indicated during a parliamentary debate that the government’s emigration policy had failed to give precedence to safeguarding the rights of migrants, who as workers ought to be defended from unscrupulous entrepreneurs, and not regard simply as Italian nationals living abroad (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 271). The examples of exploitation of Italian migrant labour put forward by Giolitti during his speech were many and deplorable. In Venezuela, for instance, the circumstances of some unemployed Italian women was so desperate that they were forced, in conditions of absolute indigence and hunger to prostitute themselves to survive (ibid.: 271-272). A group of one thousand Italian farm labourers who had emigrated to Belgium by means of a collective contract with the promise of excellent working conditions were instead compelled to work up to fifteen hours or more a day, and overtime was regularly not paid to them.

Morag Loh (1978) gathered similar instances of labour exploitation amid the recollections of the life experiences of thirty-five Italian migrant workers and their families in pre-, and post-war Australia. The oral recollection gathered by Loh (1980) of ‘Assunto’, who unwittingly ended up in the clutches of profiteers when emigrating, stands out as an example of the exploitation of Italian nationals of the immediate post-war period. Assunto migrated to Australia in the late 1940s. At twenty-two, he decided to better his circumstances by joining his brother in Australia. However, neither he nor his family had the money to pay his fare. Through family connections he was put in contact with an Italian-Australian employer who offered not only his fare and an entry permit, but also to provide him with work once in Australia, as long as he would sign a two-year contract with the obligation to work for him (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 46). Assunto signed the contract and set out for Australia:

*I thought Australia was going to be a new world and for a couple of months I really enjoyed it. [...] Then after a couple of months I start to realise how hard it was for migrants. This boss has his factory in Footscray, block and chain. He put me on as a turner, and being young, I was quick to
learn how to operate a machine. As soon as I learn he push me to produce more and more. I felt I have lost my freedom, I really have sold myself to this boss because of the fare and the contract I signed. I was suffering morally, he made me feel [he] took me down here because I was starving and consequently I had to be obedient. Fortunately, after the war I already have a taste of freedom in my town and I encourage myself to confront him. We come to a clash so I quietly said, 'Look, I get some money for two years.' I felt as a prisoner (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 46).

Assunto managed to free himself from the contractual obligations by borrowing seventy pounds from his father-in-law only nine months later.

In the early 1950s, Giovanni Sgrò experienced something similar in country Victoria while looking for work as fruit picker together with a fellow migrant. At the Cobram employment office, he received information about a nearby farm looking for farm labourers:

They gave us the address and off we went. We introduced ourselves and the manager said that we could start the next day. We asked how much they were paying per case and accepted the price. So the next day morning at 7 o’clock we were ready to begin work. There was still the problem of the place to stay. The friends who had been our hosts the previous evening had learned that the empty wagons were not about to be removed so they said: ‘If the worst comes to the worst, eat with us and sleep in the wagons’. That’s what we did for the next six weeks. The worst part was that we had done this in order to save money. But the man for whom we had agreed to work wasn’t the owner, he was a thieving contractor. He took advantage of the fact that we were foreigners and, instead of paying us weekly, he gave us some money on account, saying that we would be paid in full when the harvest was completed. We worked for six hard weeks, on piecework. When payday came this turd had disappeared. We complained at the employment office, but where were to find him? All our sacrifice went for nothing (Sgrò 2002: 38-39).

Pro-migrant organisations, such as the philanthropic society L’Umanitaria, countered the government’s optimistic picture of the conditions of Italian migrants overseas with a gloomy one in which profiteers too often swindled unexperienced migrants (Bauer 1951, from Ciuffoletti et al.: 259). L’Umanitaria invited the government to tackle the exportation and exploitation of human capital overseas, by proposing a more efficient use of existing welfare services and the re-establishment of two government bodies that had been abolished under Fascism, which had provided much-needed data about migration and services to migrants.
Up to the 1960s, Italian migrant workers, and migrant workers in general, were particularly vulnerable to incidents in the workplace, and received very little protection against them. Poor working conditions had led to a high number of fatal incidents that claimed a great number of Italian workers’ lives. In 1956, 256 miners (of whom 136 Italian nationals) lost their lives in a coalmine accident in the Belgium village of Marcinelle. Nine years later, a fatal work-related accident in Mattmark, Switzerland, claimed 88 workers, of whom 56 were Italian nationals. These incidents sparked public indignation and the perception that protective legislation was needed for Italian nationals working overseas (Volpe 1980b: 11).

In the mid-late 1960s and early 1970s, when expatriations started to decrease, the political debate on emigration in Italy intensified. It shifted focus too: from preventing the (declining) emigration flow to improving aid and assistance to those who had already emigrated. In 1968, DC Prime Minister Giovanni Leone, later Italy’s President (1971-1978), stressed in his first official address that the newly formed executive would pay utmost attention to the safeguard of Italian labour abroad. However, emigration remained a marginal issue for the Italian governments’ economic and political agendas of period 1960-1975, according to Mario Monferrini (1987: 94), although, by 1963, critical voices on the stance on emigration emerged from within the ruling DC 11.

Due to the pressure mounting from migrant organisations and the renewed interest of the political parties in the welfare of the Italian migrants overseas, the government’s emigration policy was questioned in two public enquiries (Monferrini 1987: 99). The government-funded National Council for Economy and Labour (CNEL) carried out one survey on the issue of emigration by between March 1969 and June 1970, while one *indagine conoscitiva* (parliamentary survey), was proposed by PCI and left-wing MPs and conducted between 1969-1971.

The CNEL survey proposed to lessen the devastating impact of emigration on the socio-economic fabric of some areas of the country by promoting better employment opportunities in Italy, by entering into agreement with foreign nations in the matter, and by better safeguarding the rights and workplace of the nationals abroad (Monferrini 1987: 100). After all, the survey pointed out that the departure of Italian manpower was not sufficiently counterbalanced by the migrants’ remittances and by the easing of the unemployment
pressure (Volpe 1979b: 10). The economic costs of emigration and the social burden for the communities involved were far greater for Italy than for the recipient countries of the migrant flows (ibid.), not to mention the psychological toll on the migrating individual and the families left behind. The parliamentary survey of 1969-1971 took stock of the government and trade unions’ stance on the issue, which converged on the need to move from a pro-emigration to a pro-employment policy.

For Volpe, the CNEL survey and the parliamentary survey represented a turning point, not only because they backed what the Left had been claiming for years, but also because the Italian Trade Union Movement and migrant organisations such as FILEF and the National Association of Migrants’ Families (ANFE) were, for the first time, active participants in the drafting of the two studies (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 427; Volpe 1979b: 8). Trade unions, along with migrant lobby groups, were playing an increasingly prominent role as advocates for migrants. In 1969, the trade union movement demanded from the government that it be consulted on all issues directly and indirectly concerning emigration (Ciuffoletti and Degl'Innocenti 1978: 423). According to economic historian Napoleone Colajanni, the trade union movement became the new political and cultural landmark for social reform and cultural debate in the country at that time (1990: 216). Between 1969 and 1975, with the establishment throughout the country of consigli di fabbrica (factory councils), in which both unionised and non-unionised workers participated, the influence of the unions in Italy was overwhelming (Colajanni 1990: 216-17).

The origins of FILEF in Italy and Europe

FILEF (Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori Emigrati e delle loro Famiglie, or the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and their Families) emerged as a new migrant organisation in the late 1960s. For Gaetano Volpe, long-standing secretary of FILEF Rome, the establishment of FILEF represented (in the rhetorical terms of the time) the breaking of the “conspiracy of silence” on emigration, the turning point for the Italian “migrant workers’ struggle” (1979b: 7 and 10). FILEF was established on 12 December 1967 at the Teatro Centrale, Rome, where migrant representatives, several progressive MPs and senators, as
well as leading national figures of the cultural and art scenes, such as painter Renato Guttuso and sculptor Marino Mazzacurati, were gathered together. Carlo Levi, an independent left-wing senator, writer and artist was FILEF’s leading promoter and first president. For him, FILEF had to be the wake-up call for migrants (Volpe 1979a: 41). Levi’s Marxist views of emigration became FILEF’s manifesto.

Levi interpreted the emigration of millions of Italian men and women as a forced exile, an act of social ostracism by the Italian state. The cause was the ‘racist’ component of the relationship between the hegemonic and subaltern Italian classes. The Italian authorities had, in his view, adopted paternalist, marginal measures to lighten the hardship of Italians overseas. A possible solution to the problem was the awakening of the migrants’ class conscience. In order to make their issues matter, migrants had to awaken their ‘revolutionary’ consciousness, get together and stick up for their rights, wherever they worked and lived. FILEF was to provide migrants of working- and peasant-class background with an organisational umbrella under which they could represent themselves before the Italian authorities and those of the countries they were living in.

Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, FILEF branches were set up in Switzerland, Belgium, Argentina, Germany, the UK, Canada, Australia, Peru and Sweden (Volpe 1980a: 44). In some instances, the organisation worked alongside pre-existing organisations, such as the Colonie Libere in Switzerland (Volpe 1980a: 44). Volpe identified the year 1970 as a turning point in the struggle of migrant workers for better working and living conditions, when FILEF organised a rally of one-and-a-half thousand migrant workers before the European Parliament in Luxemburg in November, and handed a white paper to the European MPs denouncing the harsh work, life and social conditions suffered by Italian migrants in Europe (Volpe 1979b: 7).

The collaboration of FILEF in the CNEL and parliamentary surveys on emigration gave FILEF members the opportunity to express the organisation’s standpoint on emigration, putting emphasis on the fact that it was the socio-economic unevenness existing in the country that had encouraged the en masse departure of Italian workers (Volpe 1979b: 12; 1979a: 40). FILEF provided the CNEL researchers with data that documented the exploitation of Italian workers in Germany, where according to the organ of the German Communist Party (DKP), some lived in sheds and were treated like POWs. In Belgium,
Italian miners who developed silicosis were refused compensation, so were similarly unrecognised work-related illnesses of Italian workers in Switzerland (Volpe 1979b: 13).

By 1970, FILEF counted arguably a widespread membership of some 50,000 and began to attract grants-in-aid from the Foreign Affairs Ministry, ending the monopoly of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats “e relative appendici in materia di accesso ai contributi erogati per l’associazionismo tra gli emigrati, all’estero e all’interno” (and associates, as far as funding to migrant organisations based in Italy and overseas was concerned).

By setting up branches in Italian migrant communities in Europe, including Italy, North and South America, and Australia, FILEF created an active network of social, political, and cultural support for migrants, and became a means for active and direct participation for hundreds of thousands of migrants in the new societies (Zaccari and FILEF Sydney 1986: 2). FILEF offered migrants the opportunity to represent themselves, their work and social concerns, as well as a platform to realize programmes and advance proposals.

The PCI Emigration Office, 1968-73

In the 1970s FILEF had and maintained close ties with the PCI. At the time of the parliamentary survey on emigration, for instance, FILEF and PCI MPs collaborated fruitfully together (Volpe 1979a: 42). Several of its activists were also PCI members, officials, MPs. FILEF’s political stance in the emigration debate converged on that of the PCI (Volpe 1979a: 42). Yet, FILEF and the PCI remained two separated identities, although everything could lead one to suppose that they were one and the same organisation. It was not in FILEF’s interests to appear officially linked to any specific party, let alone the PCI—in principles, FILEF was apolitical and open to all. Equally, it was not in the PCI’s interests to appear officially linked to FILEF. Unlike the PCI, FILEF was able to encompass in its ranks people from the entire left-wing political spectrum, not just PCI’s. It was also able to cooperate openly and without restraint with local organisations and institutions, even in countries where communist parties were banned or persecuted, such as Argentina. FILEF was instrumental in the development of the attività di massa in which PCI members, too, could get involved.
Soon after FILEF was established, the PCI set up an emigration office, supposedly around 1968, under the supervision of Nicola Gallo. The emigration office functioned as an operative base for the party activities overseas and as a liaison office for PCI-affiliated organisations such as FILEF. Structurally, the emigration office worked along the lines of an Italian PCI *comitato regionale* (regional committee). According to the recollections of Rita Riccio, who worked at the emigration office as an administrative and organizational staff member from 1972 to 1990, the office only began to function fully in 1972, when the party appointed Giuliano Pajetta as the new chief. Pajetta was a figure of high status within the party. Having had first-hand experience of emigration in the inter-war years and having worked in the PCI foreign affairs office together with his brother Giancarlo, Pajetta had a good knowledge of both migrant and foreign affairs. In addition, he was a “natural–born globetrotter” and had a gift for languages.

In 1972, Pajetta carried on Galli’s attempts to create a party structure overseas similar to that existing in Italy. The strategy was to strengthen the already-established federations and create new ones. By 1970, at least four PCI federations were established or being established overseas (one in Belgium, one in Luxemburg, and two in Switzerland), with a total membership of 8,500. In the 1970s, there was a noteworthy increase in member numbers and the number of branches and federations overseas. Simultaneously, the outputs of the party and local progressive press circulated more widely, and *attività di massa* became more common. In 1973, PCI membership overseas increased to 12,234, including the young communist (FGCI) members. The number of PCI branches increased from 102 to 146 in a single year. The fund-raising activities raised 22,623,400 million Italian liras, up from 13,100,000 million in 1972. The number of *Feste de L’Unità* (PCI festivals) organized jumped from 22 to 66, with a record number of 26 held in Belgium.

The increase of party activities overseas continued throughout the 1970s and mirrored the fortunes of the PCI in Italy, as Giuseppe Are has pointed out. In the 1970s, the PCI experienced a sudden upsurge in votes and in membership in Italy. In 1976, it reached one of its best electoral results with 33.4% of the national vote. Since the end of the Second World War, it had never been so close to becoming the leading (and thus ruling) party in Italy. The PCI enjoyed an increase support in the wake of the 1968 events that saw the student and working class movements emerging, and managed to penetrate the
peripheral and less controllable pockets of Italian society, including that of emigrant workers (Are 1980: 15).

The primary objective of the emigration office was to enrol as many migrants as possible in the PCI. For the PCI, the politicising of emigration meant, in the end, the politicising of Italian migrants. Their enrolment in the party had met two goals: that is, officially, to ‘emancipate’ the Italian working class, which meant to encourage the migrant workers to get involved in politics by joining left-wing party and union structures; in practice, it aimed to cultivate a political allegiance among the migrants in the prospect of their temporary or definitive homecoming.

The success of the party on polling-day, as far as the migrants’ homecoming was concerned, could involve capitalising on the political allegiance previously cultivated overseas. The ‘migrant vote’ constituted a significant portion of the total Italian electorate, approximately two and a half million. In 1973, Pajetta estimated that an average of 300-350,000 Italian migrants returned home and cast their votes during national and local elections in Italy. The PCI developed several initiatives to help the migrants come back home and vote. Riccio recalled the treni rossi (literally, ‘red trains’), a term denoting the homecoming, assisted by the PCI, FILEF and like-minded organisations, of thousands of Italian migrants from all over Europe. As the PCI held out hopes of attracting the migrant vote, the migrants who had joined the PCI looked forward to electing a pro-workers government, especially in the 1970s. These migrants hoped that a PCI-led government would promote a full employment policy and eventually eradicate emigration. In other words, the cultivation of the migrant vote was seen as a strategy, which might succeed in giving the PCI, already close behind the DC in votes, a majority in the electorate.

The politicising by the PCI of the migrants living in non-European countries (that is, in the Americas and Australia) took on a different character. The reason for this was the prohibitive cost of assisting the return of these migrants so they could complete the process of voting. Then, and up until 2001, the Italian constitution required Italian nationals permanently residing abroad and wishing to cast their votes during national elections to come back to Italy to vote in their hometowns. For this reason, the PCI propaganda machine relied on the traditional correspondence between the migrants and their relatives residing in Italy. The party attempted to persuade its migrant members to write home and to encourage family
to vote for the PCI. The following is from an undated draft of a letter that was intended to convince overseas members to influence their friends’ and family’s votes:

*Vi scrivo in un’occasione che ritengo molto importante per voi tutti in Italia, ma soprattutto per noi emigrati all’estero, cioè l’occasione delle elezioni politiche... Noi emigrati vogliamo un governo che finalmente affronti i problemi di tutti i lavoratori italiani, sia quelli in Italia che quelli all’estero, un governo che non costringa più masse di lavoratori ad andare a cercare lavoro in terre lontane, dove troveranno più spesso sofferenze che benessere. Pensiamo anche che i democristiani non debbano più governare in Italia, e che è giunto il momento di cambiare. Io vi scrivo per invitarti a votare e a far votare tutti i nostri amici e conoscenti per il Partito Comunista Italiano, [sic] che ci dà la speranza di tornare un giorno in Italia e di trovare lavoro*.  

The close collaboration established between the PCI and FILEF fulfilled the second objective of the emigration office: to help affiliated organisations emerge in the overseas communities. The PCI encouraged its members to set up affiliated organisations with broader interests in the welfare, social and cultural fields by providing material, financial, and human resources.

**Conclusion**

The Italian government’s economic, employment, and emigration policies as well as the economic circumstances of the labour markets in some countries of Europe and overseas favoured the flow of an impressive number of Italians looking for employment and better living during the post-war period. Italian migrants of this period, such as Giovanni Sgrò and Vincenzo Mammoliti, embodies the typical vicissitudes of hope and hardship of many of their fellow country people who found their way to emigrate to new countries (in Giovanni and Vincenzo’s case Australia). Despite being for decades a marginal agenda item for political parties and authorities, Italian emigration was *per se* a highly political and politicised socio-economic issue, especially around the 1960s and 1970s period. The establishment of FILEF, and in parallel that of the PCI emigration office, should be considered in the historic framework of post-war emigration and the political awakening that characterised Italy in late 1960s. FILEF was the product of the increasing pressure applied by the Italian Left, primarily the PCI and the trade union movement, to the government’s
emigration policy, which was viewed by many left-wing sympathisers as paternalistic. FILEF thus expressed its desire to empower and politicise the weakest link of emigration, the working class component, by establishing self-organised branches wherever Italians emigrated. The PCI, which to FILEF offered its ideological and logical support, did likewise.

Notes to Chapter 2

1 According to Favero and Tassello (1978: 64) 26.8 million Italians emigrated overseas during the one hundred years of statistical surveys (1876-1976). Repatriations from 1905—when the first repatriation data were officially recorded—to 1976 were approximately 8.5 million.

2 The Australian government seems to have been well-aware of the Italian government’s intention of disposing of thousands of Italian unemployed workers. In November 1950, Labor MP Kim E. Beazley suggested to the Minister of Immigration Harold Holt to consider the emigration of Italian stonemasons and quarry workers to Australia, given that the Italian Government wanted “to get rid of 250,000 people a year”. See K. E. Beazley, ‘Letter to H. E. Holt’, Canberra, 22 November 1950, NAA: A434, 3021785.

3 The 1949 agricultural reform of the sector aspired to dispossess big landowners and barons of untilled land from their latifondi (large landed estates) and allot it to the contadini senza terra (landless peasants). The reform was only partially successful. The excessive fragmentation of the confiscated land and the lack of co-operatives among allottees prevented them from purchasing the machinery necessary for the cultivation of the poor soils of the allocated land.

4 In the mid- to late 1940s, the southern Italian peasant movement occupied some terre del demanio (areas of formerly state-owned land) included in the large landed estates. It claimed the right to public access and use of the once-common land.

5 Vincenzo Mammoliti, interview with author, 8 April 2002, Bulla, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


8 According to the data of the Ufficio Italiano Cambi (Italian Bureau of Exchange), the Italian post-war migrants’ remittances grew considerably in just over a decade. They added up to (US$) 32 million in 1947, 90 million in 1949, 246 million in 1958, and 288 million in 1960 (Balletta 1978: 85).

9 L’Umanitaria was established in 1893 by means of a bequest of the Mantua-born Prospero Moisè Loira, a wealthy Jewish philanthropist. The philanthropic society looked after unemployed and migrants by setting up and running trade and arts classes.

10 These are the Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione (General Commissariat of Emigration) and the Consiglio Superiore per l’Emigrazione (Higher Committee for Emigration).

11 At the eighth DC national congress (Naples 1962), MPs Emilio Colombo and Amintore Fanfani expressed their deep concern on how acutely emigration was effecting the social fabric if the country (Monferrini 1987: 90-91).

12 That is, the three major Italian trade unions: the Italian Federation of Labour (CGIL), the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Union (CISL), and the Union of Italian Labour (UIL).
13 The religious order of the Scalabrinians founded ANFE in 1947 in support and assistance of the Italian migrants overseas.

14 This rise of the influence of the trade union movement stemmed from the 1968-69 student and workers’ movements, who demanded free education, better salaries and better working conditions in Italy, where “un sistema fondato sui bassi salari e su una posizione subalterna anche socialmente della classe operaia veniva ormai respinto dalla coscienza del paese” (Colajanni 1990: 198).


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.


21 In the PCI files consulted, there is no indication of the exact time of the establishment of the PCI emigration office. However, a 1970 letter of Nicola Gallo refers to the progressive reduction of funds allocated to the office since 1968. See ‘Lettera di Nicola Gallo, ufficio emigrazione, all’ufficio di segreteria e alla presidenza’, Rome, 17 December 1970, AGIF, PCI Collection: busta 133, fogli 1030-31.

22 For example, all the federations of one Italian region referred to their own regional committee. Similarly, all the overseas federations referred to the emigration office of Rome. See Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

23 Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


32 Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Ignazio Salemi, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

33 Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

34 Ibid.

35 Draft of a letter, undated, FMA. See also Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author). Martinengo has pointed out that during national elections in Italy Il Globo asked its readership not to vote for the PCI.
Chapter 3
POST-WAR IMMIGRATION OF ITALIANS TO AUSTRALIA AND PROFILE OF THE ITALIAN-AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

Lured by the prospect of making a fortune and returning home within a few years, Italian working-class migrants faced actually years of hardship, social exclusion and cultural alienation. In this chapter, an overview of Italians settling in post-war Australia is presented. The difficulties experienced by Italians in their upwardly mobile progress in the Australian labour market and social hierarchy are also outlined. In the making of the Italian-Australian community, the 1970s ‘migrants’ represent a different type of newcomer. Generally more formally educated and politically sensitised than their predecessors, some of them would eventually form the backbone of activists of FILEF’s Melbourne chapter.

Gates wide open: the Australian post-war immigration program

Since the end of the Second World War, the Australian government has revised the country’s immigration policy many times. The mainstay of the pre-war immigration policy was rooted in the Immigration Act of 1901, well-known as the ‘White Australia policy’ (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 2), which discouraged, restricted, or hampered immigration from predominantly non-white countries. Since 1945, Australian immigration policy has gradually yet substantially changed, shifting from being restricted and racist to being more flexible and tolerant.

The turning point in the constitution of the policy was the conception and implementation of the Australian post-war immigration program. The program allowed into the country, the “abhorred ‘foreigners’ – ‘Balts’, Poles, Germans, Dutch, Italians, Yugoslavs, Greeks, and Lebanese, and, eventually, even Vietnamese, Filipinos, black Africans, and other Asians and Pacific Islanders” (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 1). The impact of the program on the
demographic characteristics of the Australian population level has been extraordinary. Census data have recorded the leap in the percentage of overseas-born residents within the total population: from 9.8% of 7.5 million people in 1947 to 20.2% of 12.7 million in 1971 (see table 2).

The causes that prompted the post-war immigration program were situated in the geo-strategic and socio-economic circumstances of twentieth-century Australia. At the time, Australia faced three crucial issues: national security, under-population and, as the war ended, post-war reconstruction. A new, more aggressive immigration program was considered by the Australian government to be a cure-all solution to these problems, and already “[…]

Table 3
Australian and overseas-born population, 1947-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Years</th>
<th>Overseas-born population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Overseas-born population %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>744,187</td>
<td>7,579,358</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1,286,466</td>
<td>8,986,530</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1,778,780</td>
<td>10,508,186</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2,579,318</td>
<td>12,755,638</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2,718,318</td>
<td>13,548,448</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3,003,834</td>
<td>14,576,330</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3,247,301</td>
<td>15,602,163</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3,688,385</td>
<td>16,850,334</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3,907,993</td>
<td>17,892,423</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4,105,444</td>
<td>18,972,350</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DILGEA 1988 (see Castles 1992: 46) and ABS, 2001 Census.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, there was an urgent need for extra skilled and particularly unskilled labourers to unleash Australia’s industrial potential. Ambitious public works projects such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme needed nothing but a
substantial labour force to be realised (Collis 1989: 31-33). The new immigration program became the solution for the paucity of local manpower.

The implementation of the new immigration policy was, however, neither swift nor did it imply a sudden U-turn in Australia’s traditional stance on ethnicity and race. In reality, the immigration program initially put emphasis on increasing the quota of immigrants, leaving unchallenged the traditional policy regarding ethnicity and race. The idea was to recruit “‘white British subjects’ and, failing that, ‘white aliens’” (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 7). To keep Australia as white and as British as possible, the first Australian Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell (Labor, 1945-1949), even set an ideal ratio of ten new British migrants for every foreigner (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 11).

When the immigration program was first implemented in 1945, the bulk of the annual quota of newcomers – approximately 70,000 – was to be composed of people from the British Isles. Eventually, an agreement between the British and Australian governments was signed in March 1946 to “provide free and assisted passages for British ex-servicemen and their dependants”, followed a year later by one for selected British civilians (Appleyard 2001: 62). Yet the two schemes failed to generate the expected outcome. The subsidised ten-pound fare to Australia did not lure enough Britons: barely 30,000 a year made the trip to Australia (Appleyard 2001: 62). One of the reasons was that, like Australia’s economy, the UK’s boom economy had generated a high demand for labourers, and therefore the UK government was reluctant to let thousands of young workers migrate (Appleyard 2001: 62-3).

Already in the mid-1940s, Australian authorities suspected that fewer prospective British immigrants might actually come to Australia than was hoped for. As Jakubowicz et al. have pointed out, in 1945 “the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Committee had raised the possibility of mass immigration of non-British Displaced Persons (DPs)”. The government feared, on the other hand, that the importation of non-British migrants might well encounter a guaranteed opposition from the Australian working class, which had in the past opposed the importation of cheap non-British labour (Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 3). Australia’s trade unions in fact feared that the influx of non-British migrants into the labour force would entail an erosion of work conditions and wages.

However, despite the initial opposition of Australian trade unions, more and more non-British immigrants were coming to Australia by means of assisted passages or agreements
with the International Refugee Organisation, mainly from the eastern European and Baltic countries. Thousands of refugees who had been caught between Nazism and Communism (e.g. Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians and Ukrainians) were recruited in the Displaced People (DP) camps between 1947 and 1953 (Jupp 1966: 7). Transported in former American troop ships, they were housed in former army and Prisoner of War (POW) camps in rural areas. They were contractually bound to work for two years at any occupation set by the Commonwealth (Kunz 1988, from Jupp 2002:12). By 1953-54, a total of 170,000 refugees had arrived in Australia (Jordens 2001: 66).

Despite all the efforts to bring as many British, and later DPs, to Australia as possible, the annual migrant inflow rapidly dried up in the early 1950s, while the need for extra labour in large engineering schemes and industrial factories increased\(^3\). The obvious solution was to turn to supplementary migrant source countries. New assisted passage agreements were signed with Holland and Italy (1951), and with Austria, Belgium, West Germany, Greece and Spain (1952) (Jordens 2001: 67). Thousands of non-British, non-DP migrants came to Australia in the course of the 1950s and 1960s. Among them, Italians formed the largest contingent.

**Australia’s first place for many: Bonegilla**

A great number of Italian migrants who arrived in Australia in the period immediately after the Second World War and up until the early 1970s were first housed in migrant hostels, typically former army and POW camps\(^4\). Their stay in these structures was meant to be temporary; this arrangement was to allow the authorities to honour government and private contracts. According to Australian historian Glenda Sluga, the role of the northeast Victorian Bonegilla Immigration Reception Centre, one of the most infamous migrant hostels in Australia’s immigrant history, was “integral to the development of an Australian post-war immigration programme” (Sluga 1988: ix). Sluga described Bonegilla, and the Bonegilla experience as shared by thousands of newly arrived immigrants, in the following way:

*Bonegilla was in some ways unique. It was to be used as a ‘staging camp’ for ‘processing’ migrants. Voluntary and refugee migrants who had exchanged two years of their labour for assisted or free...*
passages could be railed from Bonegilla to remote areas of the Australia continent, to be placed in jobs Australians did not want to do, away from metropolitan centres and in ‘critical areas of the economy’. It would also be a place where these migrants were to be ‘Australianised’, given training in the English language and familiarised with the Australian way of life, all of which was to take place within a period of six weeks. In actuality the nature of their experience varied; for some, the time there stretched out to months, for others, it may have been a matter of only a week. What all had in common was Bonegilla – as a place where their fates, at least in the immediate future, would be decided for them (Sluga 1988: ix-x).

The effects of economic downturns and periods of unemployment, Sluga notes, were immediately felt in the migrant hostels amid the mostly unskilled migrants who were often/on occasion forced to sit idle for months, fuelling widespread resentment in the reception centres (Sluga 1988: 74-75). The Bonegilla incident of 1952 occurred during a period of economic stagnation and high unemployment (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 47). In 1952 new migrants kept flowing into the Bonegilla migrant hostel, while earlier arrivals were forced to remain there until further notice. This created an explosive situation inside the camp. Initially lured by the prospect of working for two years, making a ‘fortune’ and returning home, and now finding themselves faced with an uncertain future, Italians began to demonstrate and protest (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 47-48). They demanded that both the Italian and the Australian authorities take measures: immediate repatriation or employment (Sgrò 2002: 26).

Depression and anger among migrants were reaching dangerous levels, some hanging themselves out of sheer desperation, while others were increasingly determined to rally (Sgrò 2002: 26). Very few people were trained to help the newly arrived migrants, and interpretation and translation services were virtually non-existent (Cresciani 1988b: 249). The later recollection of the Bonegilla incident by Giovanni Sgrò, who happened to be one of the rebels’ delegates, recalled the drama of the situation. It is a recounting of the events by Sgrò filled with his profound feeling of distrust towards the local Italian religious authorities and government representatives:

After many requests, the Italian consul came from Melbourne in his 131 Fiat and in a big hall, absolutely full of people, he repeated the same message that the priest had given us ['Be patient, my
sons’]. We rebelled, and only the intervention of the military police saved him. But his car was smashed to pieces. [...] We were only asking ‘Give us work or send us home to Italy’. [...] We felt all our protests up until then had been a waste of time, even the action of the consul (Sgrò 2002: 27).

Amid the recollections of those past events, Sgrò recounts his reticent, almost accidental beginnings in migrant activism, which would translate into life-long political activity in the ranks of the Victoria’s Labor Party, climaxing with his 1979 election to the Victorian Legislative Assembly, the first Italian-born parliamentarian.

So a group who came from the cities, and had more experience in organising demonstrations than us Calabrians, decided to go around to all blocks in the camp to urge all of us to rebel. [...] They asked each block to nominate a representative. [...] Our block held a meeting and after a long debate they decided to nominate me – not because I was anyone special but because no-one wanted to do it. Later, I met three or four times with other young men like myself and we fixed the date of ‘the great revolt’, as many called it. We prepared banners. It was towards the end of June when nearly all of us marched one day, in a long procession, towards the administrative centre. Along the way we smashed many windows and set fire to some of the huts. Once they saw what was happening, the authorities alerted the police, but there were only four or five of them, not nearly enough. However, when we arrived near the centre, behind the administrative offices which were our destinations, four tanks appeared, followed by over 200 soldiers. When we saw them we stopped dead in our tracks – we didn’t take one step forward. A few minutes later the office manager came out, saying that he was prepared to meet with a group of ten to fifteen of us (Sgrò 2002: 27).

For reasons similar to those recalled by Sgrò, other riots occurred in 1952. As noted by Cresciani, in October two hundred Italians from the Villawood and Matraville camps marched to the Italian consulate, demanding that they be given work or repatriated. Clashes with the police followed (Cresciani 1988b: 253). Incidents in hostels like Bonegilla immediately suspended the assisted passage accord between Italy and Australia and subsequently (if momentarily) reduced the Australian intake of Italian migrants. But as the Australian economy revived in 1954, the immigration accord with Italy was once again reactivated. Thousands upon thousands of Italians arrived in the following years. Large numbers made a yearly ‘pilgrimage’ to Ingham, Innisfail, and Cairns in Queensland, working seasonally on the cane fields—a hard and, at the time, dangerous job (Cresciani 1988b: 255).
Many others were sent to do “hard manual jobs in industry or in large-scale construction projects” (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 41).

Waves of Italian migrants to Australia

The 1950s and 1960s recorded the most substantial influx ever of Italian migrants into Australia. Already by 1950 (before any assistance passage scheme was signed between Italy and Australia), the existing Italian-born population in Australia had doubled, jumping from 33,632 in 1947 to 66,912. Some two decades later, in 1971, the Italian-born represented 2.2% of the total Australian population, 9.3% of the total foreign-born population, and just over half of the total southern-European-born population (Ware 1981: 16).

The demographic curve of the Italian-born population of Australia recorded a rise and a fall: it steepened strongly in the period from 1947 to 1951, peaked around 1961, and progressively declined from the early 1970s onwards (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 43). In the 1970s, a new wave of Italian migrants settled in Australia, as is discussed below. Altogether, from 1947 to 1980, 367,614 Italians arrived in Australia, with a net immigration gain of Italians during the same period of 272,900.

Yet the Australian authorities did not encourage the immigration of Italians at first. Calwell’s immigration program, in fact, “did not envisage recruiting south of the Alps” (Bosworth 2001: 505). Statistics on assisted passages suggest that Italians were deeply restricted in their access to the assisted passage scheme (1947-73). Only 16.6% of Italian migrants arrived in Australia in this way, compared to 86.5% of the British and 75.3% of the German migrants (Jordens 2001: 68). By and large, in the post-war period Italians emigrated to Australia by means of unassisted passage, often by what is known as ‘chain’ migration (Bosworth 2001: 506) that is, the emigration of migrants’ immediate family members or relatives.

According to the ‘desirable types’ hierarchy of the Australian government, the northern European was preferred to the southern European. It was commonly believed that northerners
were racially more acceptable and adapted more easily to the Australian way of life (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 39; Wilton and Bosworth 1984: 1-16). As far as Italians were concerned, a further distinction was made between northern and southern Italians. The presumption that Italy was racially divided between the ‘Alpines’ and the ‘Mediterraneans’, as once classified by Lyng (1927: 93), seems to have still been well-ingrained in the minds of the Australian authorities in 1948-49, when they began discussing with Italian diplomats the possibility of admitting only northern Italians to Australia. These presumptions were confirmed when the Chairman of the Immigration Planning Council, Sir John Storey, visited exclusively the northern part of Italy in the summer of 1950. However, as pointed out by Bosworth, “attitudes soon began to waver […] and categories that were declared rigid turned out to be elastic” (2001: 506). A year later an agreement was reached between Italy and Australia, with the promise by both governments to assist the passage of 20,000 Italian migrants annually over five years (Bosworth 2001: 506).

The ideal candidate for the assisted passage to Australia was to be healthy, young, male, and preferably without affiliation to either communist or fascist political parties. However, very few prospective Italian migrants passed the initial selections. Of the first batch of applications (8191), “only 62 had survived Australian screening procedures and 47 were on the high seas” (Bosworth 2001: 506). The ten-year period between 1951 and 1961, however, saw a net migration of 179,420 Italians to Australia (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 43). This is the period properly described as a time of mass emigration, especially when compared to the one that followed: between 1961 and 1971 only 72,333 Italians emigrated permanently to Australia (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 43).

The making of the Italian-Australian community

The presence of large numbers of Italian migrants in Australia, mainly concentrated in large urban centres, led to the formation of the Italian-Australian community that, after 1960,
developed a complex structure—covering not only economic, social and sporting activities but also religion, welfare, culture, education, and language (Rando 1973: 184). The historical functions of FILEF Melbourne need to be set within the socio-economic framework of this community in the 1970s, a period during which “discussions, conferences and committees of enquiries related to migrants and ethnic issues” proliferated (Martin 1978: 50).

Census data as well as enquiries and surveys carried out throughout the 1970s shed some light on the community’s residential distribution, and on the working, economic, and social conditions of Italian men and women. Post-war emigration of Italians to Australia did not only lay the groundwork for ‘Little Italies’ scattered around the country, but also contributed to the transformation of Australian urban space (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 35). It radically transformed the pattern of the residential distribution of the Italian-Australian community, with a major shift occurring from rural to urban environments. From the 1950s onwards, Italians tended to live in the booming industrial and urban centres, with the highest concentrations recorded in Melbourne and Sydney. The southern state capitals attracted more Italians than any other areas. In 1976, two thirds of Italians were concentrated primarily in two states, Victoria (42%) and New South Wales (27%), while the remaining third were distributed among South Australia (11.4%), Western Australia (10.5%), and Queensland (6.7%) (Ware 1981: 39-43).

The urbanisation of Italians during the post-war period shifted their overall occupational distribution in the Australian workforce from farming to manufacturing. Work-related figures of the 1976 census show that the great majority of Italians, like other southern European migrants, were over-represented, when compared to their Australian-born peers, in the tradesmen and labourers categories (e.g. craftsmen, production process workers and labourers). In cities, Italians found better employment opportunities, which “would give them economic security and a better future for their families” (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 45). Yet the lack of recognition of qualifications obtained overseas prevented them from taking better jobs, even though the 1976 census data showed that the proportion of Italian migrants holding some form of qualification was not significantly smaller than among the Australian-born population (Ware 1981: 36-39).
The lack of recognition of qualifications was combined with a lack of command of the English language among Italian migrants. Many Italian migrants had received little formal education before migrating, which clearly aggravated the language problems faced by them, given that it was very difficult to acquire literacy in a second language when one was not literate in one’s mother tongue (Ware 1981: 36). Thus, for many overseas-trained migrants, the lack of recognition of their qualifications and poor knowledge of the English language limited their upwardly mobile progress. Franco Lugarini, whose Italian hairdresser’s qualification was not recognised until he obtained the equivalent Australian certificate, remarked:

Certificates are a big problem for migrants. I have a friend who is a welder. Eighteen years ago he didn’t do so well in his examination, so for eighteen years he has worked as a welder but is forced to accept less pay because he hasn’t a ticket. Another friend, a barber from Argentina, has trouble too. If we can take the examination in our own language, then it would be all right, because we know our jobs. But in English, it becomes very hard (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 52).

Unskilled and semi-skilled Italian workers were usually confined to blue-collar positions where a limited knowledge of English sufficed and no qualifications were necessary10. ‘Grazia’’s testimony of her mother’s work experience in Australia in the 1950s characterises the working conditions of migrant women with poor or no knowledge of the English language:

In the ’50s when we first came here my mother couldn’t find any work because of the language. My father couldn’t stay home and lose work because of taking my mother around and she couldn’t speak English. We had a friend who worked nightshift and he volunteered to take my mother round. They went for about two weeks or so and at the end, at one place, the man said: ‘We haven’t much work, and the language […] My mother said, ‘But let me try. I’m a dressmaker. If you don’t like me I can go away. I don’t know why you don’t want me as a machinist.’ They let her try and she became one of the best machinists in the room (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 60).

Despite the difficulties they experienced, Italians showed a propensity to reach high levels of employment, even in times of large-scale unemployment such as in 1972 (Cox, Martin, and
Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975: 45). In 1976, only 2.5% of the Italian-born male population of working age (15 years and over) were unemployed; a percentage lower than that reported for the Australian-born population or for other southern-European-born groups such as the Yugoslavs and the Greeks. High employment rates were also recorded among the adult female Italian-born population. In 1976, as much as 45% of Italian-born women, mostly married, were part of the workforce. Thirty-six per cent fell into the production-process workers and labourers categories, compared to 14% of Australian-born women. Female Italian-born workers were also relatively over-represented in the construction, farm work and service areas, where they filled various positions “in family businesses or firms with an Italian connection” (Ware 1981: 52), while they failed to be adequately represented in the clerical, administrative, and above all professional areas.

Research on the situation of female migrant women in industrial occupations in Australia carried out by the CURA, however, showed that they “had little choice but to work in factories” (CURA and Storer 1976: 108). The physical conditions on factory floors varied “from reasonable to appalling” (1976: 108), while “the abuse from management related to constant work pressure” (1976: 109) was widespread. Moreover, female migrant workers had little contact with predominantly English-speaking trade union officials, which did not help them “to be in a position to achieve the improvements in their everyday working situations that they themselves want and justice demands” (1976: 109 and 114).

In 1979, ‘Francesca’ had been working for six years in a cord factory where, according to her, “work was fine”, but the physical conditions in the plant were bad, especially in winter (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 62). The lack of multilingual interpreters to liaison between the union representatives and the workers was a key issue for her:

Workers need a union but the union is a problem for me. The organiser comes and talks always in English, he talks and talks and I don’t know a thing. Out of a hundred and fifty women working full time, there’s only one Australian. There are some men too, about ten of them are Australians, mostly supervisors and mechanics. There should be interpreters but there aren’t and what are we, the Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Arabs and Turks to do? I try to ask an Egyptian lady who speaks English and Italian, ‘What are they talking about?’ ‘Oh nothing. They want a rise.’ ‘What do you think?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know.’ Why should I pay two dollars every week if I don’t know what they are talking about? If I’ve got a problem how can I go and explain? If workers are sacked the union should ask, ‘Why do
you sack our workers?’ They should ask, ‘Why does it rain in here?’ Why don’t we have heating? Why are the toilets dirty?’ [...] In Italy it was different. In my factory we had commissioni interne, the shop committee, to take up the problems in the factory (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 64).

Although Italian migrants proved to be unflagging workers (Cox, Martin, and Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975: 43), their aspiration to achieve solid economic security clashed with their over-representation in low-paid employment, which led to regular overtime and the need for second jobs. Yet even working overtime did not guarantee them a chance to dramatically improve their economic situation and to become upwardly mobile, given that “even working full-time Italian-born men and women [were] among the worst paid employees, usually contesting the title of the worst paid ethnic group with the Greeks” (Ware 1981: 67-68).

A random survey aimed at mapping poverty in Melbourne carried out by Henderson et al. (1970) showed that about 15% of Italians, and at least a quarter of those who arrived after 1960, were living below the poverty line. The causes of the relatively high percentage of Italians in poor economic conditions (twice as many as amongst the overall population) appeared to be manifold. The Henderson survey identified some of them: their low occupational status, the lack of cheap rental accommodation, the burden of helping relatives and friends waiting to come to Australia, and the lack of adequate and accessible information (that is, in the Italian language) about welfare assistance and services (Storer 1979: 293-294, from Henderson 1970). As far as the Coburg-Brunswick area was concerned, the 1974 FILEF-FEC social survey confirmed the Henderson survey findings. It found that 60% of Italian males were earning between $65 and $95 per week, and only 18% earned over $100 per week, while the median weekly wage of the Australian worker was $124 in 1974 (Storer 1979: 294).

A new type of Italian migrant arrives in the 1970s

Italian migrants of the 1950s and 1960s were from mainly peasant backgrounds, and from the South of the country, as Stephen Castles has stated:
Most migrants came from Calabria, Sicily, Abruzzi and Campania, although there were some from the north, particularly the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia. The majority were from rural areas, particularly from small towns, yet they soon concentrated in Australia’s growing industrial cities. Most migrants were aged between 20 and 40 when they left Italy. They were usually impoverished and came in order to obtain the means for family survival, or to earn the money needed to buy land or pay debts at home. Often their education was limited to primary school level, and most basic level (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 42-43).

A different type of Italian migrant appeared in the 1970s, due to the relative economic prosperity in Italy and the accompanying dramatic decrease in Italian emigration. For these newcomers, emigration was not necessarily an act of despair fuelled by the pressing need to find financial security. Typically more formally educated and politically more sensitised than their predecessors, they came to Australia to broaden their personal experiences (Bertelli 1979: 4).

Some gravitated towards left-wing migrant organisations such as FILEF rather than towards the migrant clubs that catered to Italians from a particular region or township (Alcorso, Popoli, and Rando 1992: 115). According to Carli, these new migrants were politically ‘post-68’ types, “often far left rather than the PCI; people [who] have been involved as anarchists in Italy, or in various Marxist organisations, and here they come to Australia”13. The struggles faced by three of them, Stefano de Pieri, Edoardo Burani, and Roberto Malara, are in many ways representative of the experiences of this set of newcomers.

Stefano de Pieri grew up in a farmhouse in Dosson, in the Treviso countryside in the Veneto region. He dropped out of school at the age of fifteen and started working in a local factory. In the early 1970s, he realised that his future was not in his own hometown. de Pieri joined the FGCI (Italian Youth Communist Federation) during a period when, he later recalled, “se ero giovane era obbligatorio essere di sinistra” (if you were young you had to be a left-winger)14, as he found the socio-political climate of Veneto of that time particularly suffocating:

Erano anni un po’ difficili in Italia, un po’ brutti nel Veneto. Poi, sai com’è il Veneto, molto limitato: casa, chiesa, famiglia, soprattutto in quegl’anni, molto provinciale. Era già tutto pianificato per te:
militare, ti trovi la fidanzata, ti sposi, fai la famiglia e continui a lavorare. Sicché con Sergio [Stefano’s brother] si decise che era meglio che io emigrassi.

As a young left-winger, he felt the influence and excessive power of the ruling DC that was overwhelmingly present in every facet of the traditionally conservative and devout Veneto society:

Erano i tempi dei governi di Canassi, di Rumor, di Andreotti, parliamo di mostri. Parliamo del fanfanismo. Era un periodo duro. La Democrazia Cristiana era una cosa invadente. Aveva costruito un sistema di corruzione che era talmente ovvio, talmente evidente che tu in Comune di Casier potevi andare a prendere qualsiasi permesso per fare qualsiasi porcata... Era una cosa che poi la sentivi questa dominanza della DC. Io la sentivo più a livello culturale che a livello, che so, economico. Io sentivo questa mancanza di democrazia. Poi l’Italia stessa si sposava allora con quel conservatorismo naturale degli italiani che badano molto alla forma, come sei vestito, con chi vai, quanti soldi hai, e tutto questo poi contornato da questa ghirlanda di Democrazia Cristiana corrotta. Per me era una cosa spaventosa. Io non vedevo l’ora di cambiare aria, di scappare, di andare via.

In 1974, de Pieri decided to join his brother Sergio in Australia. Sergio had migrated in 1961 and had established a name for himself as a fine organist (Armstrong 2001: 96). De Pieri’s first visa application failed, possibly because of his FGCI ticket. Only when he “took care to flourish before the authorities a written guarantee signed by the Hannans” was his application finally accepted (Armstrong 2001: 183). Not long after his arrival in Australia, he met with FILEF activist Joe Caputo, while attending a conference held by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, who later introduced him to Ignazio Salemi (see Chapter 6).

Another newcomer of this period was Edoardo Burani. He was the only son of a family of tenant farmers from Carpi, Modena. He dropped out of school at age sixteen and began to work in a shirt-manufacturing factory in Carpi. Simultaneously, he began to explore left-wing politics and joined the trade union CISL. In 1973, his desire to travel took him to the UK where, with “the excuse to learn English”, he spent ten months. After returning home, he declined a job offer and started backpacking with a friend throughout the Asian continent:
Erano i tempi che non avevo nessun impegno familiare, non avevo figli, non avevo fidanzata, e quindi son partito per l’Asia. Abbiamo attraversato l’Asia a piedi. Una volta India dovevamo decidere se continuare e andare in Australia, per poi li lavorare, prendere i soldi e tornare indietro, oppure tornare a casa\textsuperscript{18}.

In 1975, he arrived in Sydney where he decided to stay. Like de Pieri, he got in contact with members of the local FILEF branch in Leichhardt not long after his arrival. In 1976, he was granted permanent residency under the amnesty (see Chapter 8) and became committed to FILEF full-time.

Unlike de Pieri and Burani, Roberto Malara, although coming to Australia from the South of Italy, belonged to an urban, middle-class family. During his university years, Malara was attracted to the anarchist movement\textsuperscript{19}. In the mid-1970s, he met an Australian girl with whom he fell in love while living in a commune of anarchists in the Calabrian countryside. As the wave of terror associated with the far left-far right antagonism intensified in Italy during the so-called anni di piombo (literally, ‘the years of lead’), Malara followed his Australian girlfriend who had, in the meanwhile, been deported around 1977 for breaching Italian visa regulations:

[…] C’era un clima insopportabile [in Italia] e quindi quando si è paventata l’idea di venire in Australia, ho detto subito sì, voglio uscire fuori. Era una storia brutta. Non avevo un lavoro vero e proprio. Ho detto io ‘Why not, avevo questa australiana...’ Noi avevamo in progetto di viaggiare insieme, addirittura venire in Australia via terra. E invece il fatto che l’hanno buttata via ha tagliato corto tutta la storia. Allora io ho fatto domanda all’ambasciata australia a Roma. Non ci credevo che mi avrebbero dato il visto, per via di tutte le storie politiche, e invece in fine quando non pensavo più neanche al viaggio in Australia, è arrivato il visto. […] Nel giro di quattro settimane ho venduto i quattro stracci che ci avevo, la macchina, ho preso i soldi per un viaggio di andata e sono partito per l’Australia\textsuperscript{20}.

Initially, he found it difficult to settle in Australia and he returned to Italy. Months later, however, he returned to Australia and accidentally became acquainted with Alberto Bruni, a FILEF activist who was running FILEF Melbourne’s 3CR Italian programs. Bruni then
brought him into contact with FILEF, which was, in Malara’s words, the decisive factor that convinced him to remain in the country.

Conclusion

The post-war Australian immigration program allowed thousands of Italians and their families to settle in Australia’s booming industrial and urban centres. Yet for many the migrant hostels, such as Bonegilla, were their first place in Australia. In moving to Australia’s cities the majority of Italians took on the dirtiest, most tiring, alienating and boring jobs. The lack of recognition of their qualifications and their poor knowledge of the English language prevented them from fully participating in many spheres of society, from social structures to politics. In the 1970s, a new wave of Italians came to Australia, more formally educated and politically aware. They would later form one of the key components of FILEF, the migrant workers’ organisation that, in the course of the 1970s, sought to give the working-class component of post-war Italian migrants a voice.

Notes to Chapter 3

1 During the Second World War, the Japanese threatened the security of mainland Australia when they invaded the Australian-controlled islands of New Ireland and Papua, bombed the scarcely populated top-end cities of Darwin and Broome, and managed an incursion of midget submarines into Sydney Harbour (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 38).

2 Along with labour supply, Australian private enterprise and government alike faced the issue of domestic worker mobility. In 1945-46, the availability of workers in remote areas became the sine qua non for the purchase of industries previously controlled by the government (see Jakubowicz et al. 1984: 20-1).

3 Post-war migrants were often needed in unwanted, dangerous, and unskilled jobs in infrastructure projects such as the above-mentioned Snowy Mountains Scheme, “[…] in heavy industry such as the steelworks of Newcastle and Wollongong, or in the new engineering and textile factories of Sydney and Melbourne” (Castles 1992: 39).

4 The migrant hostels that accommodated the largest numbers of refugees, DPs and migrants were at Bathurst, Liverpool, and Geta in NSW, Williamstown, Bonegilla, and Fishermen’s Bend in Victoria, and Wacol in Queensland (Cresciani 1988b: 249).
The accord for assisted passage was suspended and renegotiated in 1961, once again in time of economic crisis (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 41).

Previously, the Italian-born population had increased almost ninefold between 1891 (3,890) and the outbreak of the Second World War (33,000), accounting for 0.4% of the Australian population in 1947 (Rando 1973: 63).

Cresciani noted that “[…] it was common for one member of the family to emigrate, find work and accommodation, and for other members of the family to join him later” (Cresciani 1988b: 241).

Between the 1930s and the 1960s, Italians in Australia transitioned from being a mostly rural community (61% in 1933) to an overwhelmingly urban one (71% in 1961) (Cox, Martin, and Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975: 39). In 1947, just over half of the Italians in Australia lived in rural areas such as around the cane fields of Queensland, in the fishing areas of Fremantle in Western Australia, and in the irrigated districts of Griffith in New South Wales (Price 1963). At that time, the bulk of Italians (8,500) lived in rural Queensland, even though in the most populated states (New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia) Italians resided predominantly in urban areas, (Borrie 1954).

In 1976, 63% of the male Italian-born population and almost 38% of the female Italian-born population were employed in the tradesmen and labourers group, compared to nearly 37% and 7% of their Australian-born counterparts.

The 1975 Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (Cox, Martin, and Commission of Inquiry into Poverty 1975: 42-43) proposed to provide facilities for those who were capable of being retrained or upgraded to perform more satisfying and more remunerative occupations in order to lessen the over-representation of Italian workers in the manufacturing and construction sectors. It also suggested de-urbanising the Italian-Australian communities, given that the attraction of the land was “clearly there”.

Ware explained the low unemployment rate among Italian migrants by pointing out the “relatively high proportion of the Italian-born who have their own small businesses and who give preference to other Italians when employing labour from outside the family” (1981: 45).

In the period 1971-76, a negative migration trend of Italians to Australia was recorded for the first time: 4,463 (annual average of 892) (Castles, Clearing House on Migration Issues, and Institute for Immigration and Ethnic Studies of La Trobe University 1987: 43).

Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

Bill and Lorna Hannan. Bill was a left-wing, intellectual, teacher and education administrator, who was also a cathedral chorister and a fluent Italian speaker. He met Sergio de Pieri, with whom he struck up a strong friendship. Lorna was a teacher, who served on Professor Henderson’s Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (Armstrong 2001: 119, 181).

Edoardo Burani, interview with author, 26 March 2003, Modena, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

Roberto Malara, interview with author, 15 May 2004, Thornbury, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
Chapter 4


In the 1970s, with the establishment of PCI and FILEF branches in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and other city centres a long-lasting tradition of Italian-run, working-class organisations continued in Australia. The PCI and FILEF inherited their ‘mission’ from previous organisations: to bring together the diverse wings within the Italian-Australian Left and to create a pressure group advocating the interests of the working-class. A number of influential organisations, which brought together and galvanised left-wing Italians in their constituencies from the mid 1940s to the late 1960s, can be considered the precursors of the PCI and FILEF: Italia Libera of Sydney, renamed the Club Italo-Australiano (CIA) around 1950, the Consiglio Italo-Australiano del Lavoro (CIAL) and the Lega Italo-Australiana (LIA) of Melbourne. In this chapter, their history is concisely reviewed.

The link to the anti-fascist tradition: Italia Libera

A few months before the fall of Fascism in Italy in March 1943 Italia Libera was established in Melbourne. Italia Libera offered the opportunity “to all Italians […] to exercise a distinct political choice and, to those who took it, a feeling of pride in contributing to the liberation of their country” (Cresciani 1988b: 222). At this time Italians were still considered ‘enemy aliens’ in Australia (Montagnana 1993: 140), and it is all the more remarkable that eminent Australian politicians and personalities supported the establishment of Italia Libera, such as the ex-Governor General Sir Isaac Isaacs, the Minister for Social Services, E. J. Holloway, the Minister for Aircraft Production, Senator Don Cameron, and Professor A. R. Chisholm, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Melbourne (Cresciani 1988b: 124). Chisholm was also, for some years, the honorary president of Italia Libera.
*Italia Libera*’s main agenda was to lobby for the release of Italian civilians and POWs from the interned camps and to further a campaign of anti-fascist and democratic education within the Italian-Australian community, which was accustomed to two decades of Fascist propaganda by the Italian Consular and community networks. *Italia Libera*’s size and organisational structure were considerable, for a non-English-speaking organisation of the time. In the years following its immediate inception, it had a membership of 1,500, a Central Committee in charge of matters at a federal level and of the relationship with the Australian government, six State Committees, and dozens of local branches (Montagnana 1993: 141).

According to Italian historian Marcello Montagnana (*ibid.*), *Italia Libera*’s success was possible due to its link with the *Alleanza Internazionale Giuseppe Garibaldi* – an organisation founded in Mexico by socialist and communist émigrés – and the vital contribution of educated Jewish Italians (e.g. Massimo Montagnana, Fulvio Levi, Franco Forti, Rosa Narducci Montagnana, and Ernesto Monti) who had fled Italy after the promulgation of the 1938 racial laws and were committed to the organisation. These Italians held important positions in *Italia Libera*: Massimo Montagnana became secretary, Fulvio Levi vice-secretary, Franco Forti, Rosa Narducci Montagnana, and Ernesto Monti were founding members.

In 1944, *Italia Libera* began publication of its biweekly *Il Risveglio*, which represented the first regular means of contact with anti-fascist Italians in Australia after the past failed attempts of other like-minded newspapers. At least twenty per cent of the Italian readership in Australia was believed to have had access to *Il Risveglio* (Montagnana 1993: 144). The rising popularity of *Italia Libera* and its periodical alarmed the Catholic Church and ultra-conservative quarters. In 1944, Jesuit Ugo Modotti began publishing of *L’Angelo della Famiglia*, which warned Italians to be aware of the “atheist” anti-fascists (Cresciani 1980: 213; Cappello 1999: 96-100). Then, in 1947, diocesan priest Giuseppe La Rosa, who worked for the Apostolic Delegate Giovanni Panico, launched the more successful *La Fiamma*, which was to offset “the poisonous influence of a leftist and pro-communist Italian newspaper” (Cresciani 1988b: 243; La Rosa 1995: 177-185; Cappello 1999: 99). Equally alarming to Italian and Australian conservatives was *Italia Libera*’s connection with the CPA, with which it shared the political platform. The CPA exercised considerable influence on the Italian organisation, which was reflected, for instance, in the decision of *Italia Libera*...
to move its central office from Melbourne to Sydney in late 1944 where the CPA centralised its headquarters (Carli 1982: 11).

When the Australian government showed increased intolerance towards what it perceived as the ‘Red Scare’ in the 1950s, Italia Libera’s members were often subjected to harassment by the authorities (Carli 1982: 13). The most notable incident happened in 1953, when the Australian Government attempted to deport the then secretary of Italia Libera and Il Risveglio editor Mario Abbiezzi allegedly for his left-wing militancy and for the critique of Italian emigration and Australian immigration policies published in Il Risveglio (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 161).

By 1950, Italia Libera felt the need to re-focus its mission and activities. Several of its activists returned to Italy and its original raison d’être the fight against Fascism no longer existed. A new objective was found in the task of assisting newly arrived Italian migrants, who were emigrating en masse to Australia. During the 1950 Italo-Australian National Congress, Italia Libera articulated a program of assistance for fellow migrants (Carli 1982: 11-12) and not long after changed its name into Club Italo-Australiano (CIA)¹.

Yet, harassed by the Catholic Church press and the Australian government, the CIA was cornered politically and fell into isolation and factionalism (Carli 1982: 12), as did the CPA. Il Risveglio failed to reach mass circulation and became too overtly political for its Italian readership (ibid.: 16). In January 1957, it folded, partly due “to the death of Omero Schiassi in Melbourne, who was not only the first Italian lecturer at Melbourne University but also the intellectual mainstay of the anti-fascist movement and Il Risveglio” (ibid.: 16). With the closing down of its periodical, the CIA found its influence much reduced.

The Consiglio Italo-Australiano del Lavoro and the political careers of Giuseppe Di Salvo and Nino Randazzo

In Melbourne, two organisations similar to the CIA formed at the end of the 1950s: the Consiglio Italo-Australiano del Lavoro (CIAL) and the Lega Italo-Australiana (LIA). The CIAL was established around 1956 by a retired sea captain, Giuseppe Di Salvo, ALP member and union organiser Nino Randazzo and CPA member Giovanni Sgrò who later
joined the ALP. It was, according to Allan’s topography of migrant political activity in Victoria (Allan 1978: 23), an extra-party ethnic adherent organisation not formally linked with the ALP but one that had organised the Italian-Australian community to vote for it (ibid.: 24). In 1956, the CIAL began publishing its bi-monthly, then monthly, *Il Progresso Italo-Australiano*, which was distributed through a number of unions. Based at the Trades Hall in Carlton *Il Progresso Italo-Australiano* and the CIAL during the 1960s organised “Italian migrants within the union movement, in support of the ALP, and against the Vietnam War” (Lopez 2000: 435-36).

The fortunes of the CIAL, and partly of *Il Progresso Italo-Australiano*, were closely linked to the political career of Di Salvo. Di Salvo ran for a pre-selection bid for the Victorian federal seat of Batman in 1966. Although he was endorsed by all three delegates of the ALP Batman Federal Campaign Committee, his bid failed (Carli 1982: 18; Allan 1978: 24). Left-wing unions, which then dominated the ALP Victorian Central Committee and had the ultimate say on pre-selections, eventually backed another candidate, J. W. Anderson, the former Mayor and Councillor of Heidelberg, Melbourne (Carli 1982: 18; Allan 1978: 24). Many Italians felt that this was an intolerable and anti-migrant interference by the left-wing unions and as a result, left the CIAL in large numbers marking its quick demise (Carli 1982: 18).

Besides Di Salvo, Nino Randazzo also attempted to forge a political career, at state level in 1963. By then, he was editor of *Il Globo* and no longer in the CIAL. He was nominated DLP candidate for the seat of Fitzroy during the 1963 State elections. The Democratic Labor Party (DLP) then enjoyed a special relationship with prominent figures of the Italian community such as Gualtiero Vaccari due to his connection with the higher echelons of the Catholic Church. Randazzo’s was “the first political attempt to win the Italian vote by appealing to the ethnic loyalties of Italians” (Carli 1982: 16-17). Although the electorate seemed ideal with its high concentration of Italians, despite the full support of *Il Globo* and the DLP electoral machine, Randazzo was defeated (Carli 1982: 17; Jupp 1966: 94).
The *Lega Italo-Australiana*

In July 1958, left wing and Marxist Italians of Melbourne, whom some were former *Italia Libera*-CIA members, established the *Lega Italo-Australiana* (LIA): Emilio Deleidi, Pietro Rivarera, Franco Schiavoni, R. Cernigoi, Zammarchi, Assunto Colli, Vincenzo Mammoliti, Ceccaroni, Coffa, De Battista, Saurini, Bucella, Stilla, La Riccia, Matteo Cristofaro, and Paul De Angelis. LIA’s manifesto reflected the social-welfare nature of the organisation and recognised the need to collaborate with the Australian community in an harmonious manner. It included a) the defence of Italian prestige, b) the fight against factionalism, c) the social and intellectual development of members, d) the cementing of friendship between Italians and Australians, e) the promotion of better understanding of the role of the trade unions, moral and material assistance to members in need, and f) the collaboration with all migrant-related organisations.

In April 1963, the LIA began the publication of its monthly *Il Nuovo Paese*, which proclaimed to be “an independent, social and commercial newspaper of the Italian community of Australia” as the page heading claimed. *Il Nuovo Paese* opted to challenge the conservative *Il Globo*, which was published by Tarvisio Valmorbida and Ubaldo La Robina since 1959. As recalled by *Il Nuovo Paese*’s former editor Emilio Deleidi, *Il Globo* “pendeva troppo sulla parte dei signori”. *Il Nuovo Paese*’s first editorial justified the *raison d’être* of the newspaper:

*Era necessario, indilazionabile perciò che qualcuno prendesse l’iniziativa di creare qualcosa che i nostri emigrati da tempo attendevano. E’ nato così *Il Nuovo Paese* questo giornale che nasce dal nulla e non da una singola iniziativa, ma da una necessità comune, voluto, sostenuto e indistintamente finanziato: dal lavoratore della fabbrica, al negoziante dal commerciante al libero professionista. E’ nato insomma dal largo consenso della nostra Comunità per cui *Il Nuovo Paese* non può essere che l’espressione genuina dei nostri emigranti. Il *Nuovo Paese* è stato creato quale giornale democratico indipendente e con un programma atto a sopperire alle necessità che nascono per un processo logico in un paese di lingua differente. Il suo programma mira ad un maggiore avvicinamento, comprensione e reciproca collaborazione tra gli italiani che vivono in questo paese e con il popolo Australiano con il quale si condividono giorno per giorno, necessità ed aspirazioni.*
Il Nuovo Paese’s aim was to be a community paper, that was to be supported and funded by the factory worker as well as the shopkeeper, the dealer, and the professional\textsuperscript{10}. The LIA wanted to convey the message that Il Nuovo Paese held no political and organisational affiliations, even with LIA. Thus neither in the credits nor in the editorial, was the LIA mentioned. The only references in Il Nuovo Paese appeared in form of brief news items. While the first issue bore the name of Emilio Deleidi as editor, this was then replaced for “security reasons” from the second issue onwards with the name of another LIA member, Assunto Colli\textsuperscript{11}. Il Nuovo Paese took these measures in order to not appear as a communist newspaper. Deleidi has recalled an episode that significantly highlights how alive the anti-communist feelings in the 1960s still were:


Although Il Nuovo Paese pretended to be a social and commercial newspaper, it clearly offered an alternative, left-wing source of information aside the usual Il Globo and La Fiamma for Italian-speaking readers. A letter to the editor by Federico Sabatini of Griffith, NSW, indicates an example of the kind of readership Il Nuovo Paese attracted.

[…] Finalmente gli operai italiani hanno un giornale che interpreta le loro aspirazioni, un giornale che difende degne e integralmente i loro diritti, un giornale infine che presenta ai nostri migranti una interpretazione chiara ed obiettiva degli avvenimenti internazionali. La nascita di Il
The paper mainly contained news items concerning unions, and political, social, and sport issues. Particular emphasis was put on discrimination suffered by migrant workers in Australia and elsewhere, ranging from low-paid salaries to the lack of social security or pension funds. Ample space was also given to articles regarding local trade union initiatives and struggles in form of interviews which trade union officials, reports of workers’ dismissals, pay-rises, work-related accidents, strikes, trade union’s public meetings, et cetera.

*Il Nuovo Paese* reprinted news items from the international and Italian left-wing press, such as *L’Unità* and the progressive *Vie Nuove*. Such news items regarded, for instance, social and political injustices against the African-American population in the United States and in South Africa, or the peace movement marches organised around the world at the time of the Vietnam War. Several articles revoked episodes of the Italian Resistance during the Second World War. These and other articles stimulated in particular the interest of some readers, among whom some were former partisans themselves.

Although *Il Nuovo Paese* managed to have a maximum circulation as high as 5,000, it suffered a chronic funding problem. It had to rely almost exclusively on volunteers for management, editing, and distribution, because the hiring of professional journalist was simply too expensive. Eventually, in 1966, it ceased publication (Carli 1982: 16) and moved to Sydney.

The LIA was supposed to be the *organizzazione di massa* (mass organisation) of the CPA within the Italian-Australian community (Carli 1982: 16). But like the CIA, by the late 1960s, it was isolated and divided (Carli 1982: 21) and its activities “had been reduced to dinner-dances” in a hall hired by the CPA, the Albion Hall on Lygon Street, East Brunswick (Armstrong 2001: 196).
Conclusion

The fortunes of all three organisations, Italia Libera, the CIAL, and the LIA were shaped by the interplay of similar internal and external factors, which eventually led to their demise. All three launched initially successful newspapers that helped to spread their political viewpoints and program of activities. They followed communist or Labor party-political affiliations. They had leaders who at the same time or subsequently embarked, unsuccessfully, on political careers. They also had to manoeuvre in the political climate of the Cold War and suffered both from the hostility of the Australian Trade Union Movement towards politically active migrant workers and ideological factionalism. Because of all these factors as well as their short-lived political influence within the Italian-Australian community, they failed to become sizable left-wing lobby groups in the end. In Melbourne, the rapid decline of the LIA, which failed to organise left-wing Italians around itself and its newspaper, left the way open for the rise of the PCI and FILEF in the early 1970s.

Notes to Chapter 4

1  Note that according to Carli (1982: 12), Italia Libera renamed was the Italo-Australian League. Other sources (such as Lever-Tracy & Quinlan 1988: 153) refer instead to it as the Italo-Australian Club.
2  Note that a few hundred Italians joined the CIAL, of which only a handful later joined the ALP (Carli 1982: 16).
3  However, many Italians in Fitzroy were not naturalised, and thus could not vote (Jupp 1966: 94).
4  Cristofaro and De Angelis had also been the founding members of Italia Libera, and Cristofaro alongside Omero Schiassi of an Italian Anti-fascist Movement in 1942. See Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); ‘Draft of the minutes of the LIA’s executive committee elections’, circa 1963, courtesy of the Emilio Deleidi Private Collection.
5  For instance, in June 1959, the LIA formed an assistance committee in solidarity with the unionised Italian-born seamen on strike and during the economic crisis of 1961, it formed another assistance committee in favour of unemployed Italians. See ‘Lega Italo-Australiana’, Il Nuovo Paese, April 1963.
6  From the LIA program printed on the inside of membership tickets, courtesy of the Emilio Deleidi Private Collection.
7  The publication of Il Nuovo Paese has escaped the notice of nearly all historians. Only Gilson & Zubrzycki (1967: 203) list it in their bibliography of the Australian foreign-language press.
8  Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
10 Ibid.
11 Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
12 Ibid.
15 Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
16 Ibid.
Chapter 5
ITALIAN COMMUNISTS IN AUSTRALIA REGROUP:
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PCI

From the mid-1960s onwards, the CPA’s leadership developed a new party policy termed ‘Australian road to socialism’, which was articulated along the lines of the similar policy of the PCI in Italy. As the CPA worked towards an Italian-style communist party, both at political and organisational level, Italian communists in Australia (mostly Stalinists) found themselves increasingly uneasy with the CPA and, in 1971, eventually decided to establish PCI branches in Australia. The Independent PCI Federation (IPCIF) in Australia was meant to act as liaison between the CPA, the Italian communists, and the large Italian-Australian community. Yet soon, it found itself trapped in out-of-date ideological rows, personal disputes and organisational impotence. However, these circumstances would rapidly change in 1973 with the visits of PCI officials Giuliano Pajetta and Ignazio Salemi.

The Italian-style road to socialism of the CPA

When the party lines of international communism divided during the so-called Sino-Soviet dispute\(^1\), the CPA leadership’s dependency from international communism, and its vulnerability were revealed. In 1961, the CPA leadership that had at first supported China, “switched its loyalties to the USSR” and came out deeply divided and torn by internal factioning (Davidson 1969: 148). As the Sino-Soviet dispute resolved with the split of international communism, the hard-line pro-Chinese faction of the CPA found itself in bitter contrast with the CPA pro-Soviet majority. In 1963, the split became inevitable. The Victorian state secretary Ted Hill, who was “accused of pursuing an extremist ultra-left line totally unsuitable for a country like Australia”, led the pro-Chinese faction to split from the
party and to form the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), the CPA (ML) (Taft 1994: 127).

The 1963 expulsion of the pro-Chinese (Maoist) splinter group and the election of the progressive Laurie Aarons to the secretaryship in 1965, was a turning point in the history of the CPA. Bernie Taft, who was one of the CPA leaders in Victoria from the 1960s to 1982, recalled that the party then freed itself “from the old concepts and restrictions which had acted as a barrier to growth and change” and allowed “younger, more creative people [to] come to the forefront” (Taft 1994: 131). The CPA moved towards a new party policy that contemplated an Australian road to socialism, which included “the possibility of peaceful establishment of socialism by parliamentary means” and rejected the inept long-lasting idea of the violent taking of power by the Australian proletariat and the Stalinist theory of socialism in one country (Davidson 1969: 158). This new policy articulated along the lines of the Italian road to socialism⁴, which brought the CPA to come to terms with the Australian rather than the international situation.

Since 1956, “national communists” had formed a loose grouping in Victoria and lobbied for the return of the CPA to the origins of Australian socialism. Then, young party cadres and trade unionists had become interested “in the polycentrist theories of Togliatti” (Davidson 1969: 148), which “rejected the prevailing view that there was a single centre, namely Moscow, for the world communist movement” (ibid.: 150). While the higher party echelons dismantled the “Victorians” at the time, about a decade later, the “Victorians”, now the “Australian” group, regrouped and coalesced with Aarons’ followers (ibid.: 163). With Aarons as national secretary, the party took into consideration an Italian-style Australian line and looked to the PCI for inspiration. The PCI at the time represented a beacon of light for small, western communist parties, then being the biggest and the most influential communist party in the West.

The CPA press promoted the writings of the PCI leaders, thus increasing the popularity of the PCI among Australian communists. Although “most Australian communists interested in the Italian developments probably left in the 1956-58 expulsions of ‘revisionists’ […] the PCI Foreign Bulletin continued to arrive regularly, and the ideas contained in it caused a ferment in 1959-60 among the Victorian ‘younger cadres’” (Davidson 1969: 166). By 1963-64, many young Italian-line communists in Sydney and Melbourne, were reading as much
Italian material as possible (*ibid*). Reporting to the Central Committee about his visit to Italy and France at the end of 1964, Aarons said he was “impressed by the Italian and French parties” and discussed “the possibility of a plurality of parties in a socialist society, and the need to work for a mass communist party of the Italian and French type” (Taft 1994: 150).

It is interesting to note that, as the CPA developed a party policy which drew inspiration from the PCI, Italian communists in Australia who belonged to or sympathized with the CPA were beginning to distance themselves further from the Australian party, as argued by Carli (1982: 22-23). As events and developments taking place in the international communist world once more determined the CPA’s future, and so did they determine the relationship between Italian and Australian communists in Australia.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 obliged the CPA, as well as all the other communist parties around the world, to take a stance on the violent ending of the “Prague Spring”. While the CPA strongly opposed it, the hard-line pro-Soviet faction inside the party, backed by representatives of the CPSU in Australia, supported the invasion and lobbied a “changing of the guard” on party leadership level (Blunden 1993). In Australia, “the dispute over the Soviet invasion […] developed into a faction fight in which both sides were able to accuse the other of ‘splitting’. By June 1971, the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) had been launched with the practice of following the line from Moscow through thick and thin as its foundation (Blunden 1993).

Ideological divergences, and most likely cultural differences as well, were starting to create and deepen frictions between the Italian communists and the CPA, a situation that eventually helped the establishment of the PCI in Australia. In the early 1970s, the Italian communists considered the PCI as a valid alternative to the CPA, at an ideological and organisational level. The PCI was a party that the Italian communists had known or to which they had belonged before migrating to Australia, and it was “a party they viewed with great nostalgia” (Carli 1982: 22). Just before a further division occurred between the main body of the CPA and its pro-Soviet wing in December 1971, Italian communists in Australia distanced themselves from the CPA and formed Australian branches of the PCI.
The establishment of the PCI in Australia

The occasion that triggered the establishment of what would be an independent PCI federation (IPCIF)—an embryonic network of cells with the potential to become a well-structured federation, similar to those existing in Switzerland and Germany, with thousands of PCI members—was the visit of Diego Novelli, a *L’Unità* journalist and PCI official. Novelli came to Australia around August-September 1971 to report on the conditions of Italian migrant workers in Australia. His trip also included meetings with CPA leaders and Italian communists. In an account of his trip, written for the Party Secretariat, Novelli acknowledged that the relation between the CPA and the Italian communists was uneasy. Because of past ideological and organisational divergences, there was still much mistrust between them, especially as a result of the anti-Soviet stance of the CPA leadership in the wake of the Prague events of 1968. Novelli wrote:

*Sin dalla prima sera che sono giunto a Sydney ho avuto contatti con un gruppo di compagni italiani emigrati in Australia convocati presso la sede del PC Australiano dal compagno Palmada (responsabile del lavoro verso gli emigrati di ogni paese). Dalle prime battute mi sono reso conto che non c’era una atmosfera cordiale tra i nostri compagni e quelli australiani a causa delle divisioni interne del PC australiano, soprattutto vi era molta diffidenza per ciò che era accaduto nel passato. I nostri compagni lamentavano di non essere stati aiutati quando venne decisa la pubblicazione del giornale “nuovo paese” e poi “nuova era”; non solo, ma secondo alcuni giudizi a mio avviso un po’ troppo severi, il PCA avrebbe avuto avuto timore di una organizzazione autonoma dei comunisti italiani. Ho discusso a lungo con i compagni italiani per chiarire con loro le varie divergenze invitandoli a superare certi contrasti determinati dalle posizioni un po’ rigide assunte nel passato dai dirigenti del PC australiano. Alcuni nostri compagni sono in forte polemica con le posizioni del PCA in merito ai fatti della Cecoslovacchia non perché non condividano la posizione assunta (analoge alla nostra) in merito all’intervento della Cecoslovacchia ma perché non si spiegano, giustamente, certe forme esasperate di antisovietismo.*

To Novelli, Italian communists in Australia appeared remarkably pro-Soviet. He concluded that this could be the product of the tyranny of distance and the lack of up-to-date information in the Italian language. In fact, as Carli has pointed out, the ideas of Italians who migrated in the early post-war period had stagnated to reflect the Italian political scene of the
time before their migration, when the PCI was very much following the Moscow line (1982: 22). The change that had occurred in Italy “after 1961 – and particularly the changes within the PCI, which went from a fairly hard lined pro-Soviet party of the 1950s to the independent Euro-communist party of the 1970s – was largely unknown to those that formed the PCI in Australia and unknown to the Australian Italians” (Carli 1982: 22). Novelli noted that the scarce Italian communist publications that had from time to time reached Australia had not been delivered for months, and that this prolonged lack of information had resulted in an “almost absolute” ignorance among Italian communists of current PCI policies and strategies.

One of Novelli’s tasks was to facilitate the establishment of a renewed rapport between the CPA and its Italian members and sympathisers. During his stay in Sydney, Novelli spoke at great length with some top-level CPA members, such as Laurie Aarons, Bernie Taft and Joe Palmada. The core of their discussions was aimed at finding a common ground and ending the dispute between Australian and Italian members and sympathisers of the CPA. In the meeting that followed between Novelli and the Italian communists, Novelli put forward three possible solutions to the estrangement between the CPA and the Italian communists: the admission of Italian communists to the CPA, the formation of an independent PCI federation in Australia, and the formation of a left-wing federation of Italian workers (that is, the organismo di massa). After the first solution was rejected, there was further debate on the remaining two. Eventually, it was decided to set up an independent PCI federation in Australia.

As a result, a first PCI cell was established in Sydney, where an executive committee of four ‘comrades’, Mario Abbiezzi, Salvatore Palazzolo, Francesco De Bella, and Dimitri Oliva, was appointed and a membership campaign launched. Other cells were set up as Novelli’s trip led him to Wollongong, Newcastle, Melbourne and Darwin. Whenever possible, Novelli met with local Italian migrants, often in their workplaces, and invited them to join the party. When he felt it was appropriate, he entrusted some of them with the tasks of establishing a party cell or co-ordinating the party’s propaganda activities. For instance, in Wollongong and Newcastle, he made contact with local Italian communists and put them in contact with those in Sydney. In Melbourne, through the mediation and with the help of
Palazzolo, he organised meetings and managed to enrol some twenty Italian migrants in the party.

As he travelled from city to city, Novelli was struck by the disadvantaged life conditions of many of the Italian migrants:

Le condizioni di vita dei nostri connazionali, tranne che per una minoranza, (coloro che sono emigrati prima della seconda guerra mondiale o negli anni ’47-1955) non sono molto buone: possono effettuare dei risparmi a costo di grandi sacrifici, (doppio lavoro, straordinari a non finire ecc.)

These circumstances were reflected in a range of social and welfare dysfunctions, which Novelli listed, demanding they be discussed urgently in parliamentary debate in Italy:

I problemi più urgenti da affrontare in sede politica in Italia riguardano: 1°) Il diritto a trasferire la pensione in Italia oggi non concesso; 2°) riconoscimento delle qualifiche professionali; 3°) il problema delle abitazioni; 4°) l’istruzione per i figli; 5°) l’assistenza malattie; 6°) il costo dei viaggi per ritornare in Italia anche solo per una visita; 7°) le informazioni che forniscono gli uffici del lavoro in Italia non corrispondenti a verità; 9°) l’atteggiamento delle autorità consolari italiane in Australia. Su queste questioni mi sono impegnato in tutti gli incontri che ho avuto con le varie comunità italiane a Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Melbourne, Darwin ecc. di fare presentare dal nostro gruppo parlamentare una interpellanza perché siano discusse dal Governo Italiano con il Governo Australiano le condizioni di vita dei nostri emigrati.

At the same time, Novelli foresaw the potential of the newly established IPCIF to tackle the supposedly widespread discontent among Italian-Australians, and facilitating its political penetration of the community, as had happened in Italian communities in Western Europe:

Prima fra tutte la questione delle pensioni: se riuscissimo a strappare qualche cosa su questo punto sarebbe un successo enorme! Non entro nei dettagli sulle condizioni di vita degli ultimi arrivati, soprattutto i giovani che vivono nei campi... scriverò sull’Unità tutto, però come partito dobbiamo fare una grande azione sul piano politico, di denuncia, promuovendo anche una azione dei sindacati. A questo proposito tra le proposte formulate vi è quella di avere un compagno (comunista!) in Australia che faccia ufficialmente il lavoro sindacale. [...] Su questo non dobbiamo dormire: un
compagno sveglio, nel giro di pochi mesi può fare un lavoro gigantesco: c’è solo da raccogliere, non esagero, e non pecco di facile ottimismo.\footnote{12}

Novelli’s vision, which saw the IPCIF gain political success among migrants by tackling their problems, followed the propaganda strategy of the PCI Emigration Office (see Chapter 2). This strategy was feasible in Europe, if aimed to cultivate an electoral allegiance, but unsuitable outside the continent. However, Novelli suggested to the PCI Central Committee to take into account the option of organizing the \textit{en masse} return to Italy of Italian migrants for the 1973 national elections, bearing in mind that, “i fascisti già si sono fatti vivi a Sydney, [...] per il voto siciliano” (for the elections to be held in Sicily the fascists already turned up in Sydney).\footnote{13}

To cement the friendship between Italian and Australian communists, the former now with their own “independent” federation, Novelli suggested the implementation of a set of proposals, to be jointly supported by the IPCIF and the CPA.\footnote{14} These proposals would represent the \textit{de facto} launch \textit{in loco} of PCI activities. For instance, publication of a four-page newspaper was proposed with three pages to be edited in Rome and sent to Australia, and a fourth one to be edited by the Italian communists in Australia. The CPA was entrusted with the task of publishing the periodical in its own printery. A second proposal suggested the establishment of a PCI training school, presumably along the lines of \textit{Le Frattocchie} of Rome, noting that “gli spagnoli appena hanno saputo di questa iniziativa hanno chiesto di poter partecipare e di fare i corsi assieme” (just from having heard about it, the Spaniards sought to be part of it and to run classes together).\footnote{15} Another proposal even suggested the creation of a PCI-affiliated \textit{Italturist} travel agency in Australia, “tenuto conto delle grandi richieste di viaggi per l’Italia che ogni mese vengono effettuate da italiani che rientrano per un mese di vacanza. I compagni Australiani vedono molto bene questa iniziativa che potrebbe rendere quattrini” (given the monthly high volume of bookings by Italian migrants for 4-week holiday trips to Italy. The Australian comrades deem such business enterprise a pretty lucrative one).\footnote{16}

The implementation of all these proposals would have closely and fruitfully linked both Italian and Australian communists. The CPA was eager to recruit members within the large Italian-Australian working class and to enlarge its membership of barely three thousand. It
viewed the link with the IPCIF as a bridge that allowed it to reach Italians in Australia. However, as Novelli left Australia, developments took a different turn.

Frictions emerge between the Australian PCI and the CPA

The good intentions originally declared by the IPCIF and the CPA, to work side-by-side derailed almost immediately after Novelli’s departure. In November 1971, the IPCIF’s Executive Committee in Sydney communicated to Novelli that the CPA had expressed second thoughts about the organisation and had concerns about the development of its activities, which were according to the CPA, “troppo poco ideologizzat[e], non ben definit[e] sul piano politico” (not enough ideologically-driven and poorly elaborated at policy level). Some months later, the CPA also expressed irritation with the IPCIF Executive Committee’s for its failure to collaborate with the CPA and “get the necessary activities going”. Mutual mistrust grew instead of fading away, and all the activities on which the two organisations had previously agreed to co-operate were stalled for over a year.

The IPCIF formulated its political views in a report written by its secretary Salvatore Palazzolo, six months after the IPCIF constituent congress, held in Melbourne in March 1972, had officially inaugurated the beginning of its activities in Australia. Written almost a year after Novelli’s visit, Palazzolo’s report conveys the stimulus of the new ideas that spread as a result of the established contacts with the PCI Emigration Office and the circulation of Italian communist propaganda. The IPCIF stated that it committed itself to embracing the PCI’s via italiana al socialismo (Italian road to Socialism), which meant projecting onto Australia what the PCI was trying to realize in Italy and cooperating with all the left-wing parties, not just with the CPA. In other words, the IPCIF justified its practice of debating with various left-wing Australian parties and trade unions whenever Italian workers were involved in industrial relations disputes, and of planning the adoption of common tactics and actions amongst the parties involved.

The IPCIF’s political project aimed to validate its split from the CPA, and to establish contacts with the SPA and the left wing of the ALP. This position, favourable towards the SPA and the left wing of the ALP “where a great deal of Italians were involved”, was
confirmed during the Second IPCIF Congress held in Melbourne in July 1972, and irritated the CPA\(^24\).

In the meanwhile, the CPA had requested that the PCI in Rome take a stand on the matter and take over the reins of the IPCIF. Laurie Aarons proposed that the PCI send one of its representatives, as the collaboration with the IPCIF was not getting off the ground\(^25\). Aarons felt that the IPCIF urgently needed some guidance from Rome.

A few months later, head of the PCI Emigration Office Giuliano Pajetta acknowledged that the situation of the IPCIF in Australia was worsening and that the IPCIF had not developed significantly. Neither did it not seem have organised any political or mass actions of relevance\(^26\). Pajetta felt that the IPCIF’s stagnant situation and scarce results were even more disappointing given the fact that the national political scene in Australia had radically changed at the end of 1972, when Labor gained power.

By 1973, the IPCIF was still unable to develop any *attività di massa*. The CPA thought the problem originated in the upper ranks of the IPCIF. In a letter to Giuliano Pajetta, Laurie Aarons commented:

*Il problema essenziale è che la maggior parte di questi dirigenti vivono nel passato, non sono capaci di vedere le novità e sono anche autoritari nel loro atteggiamento verso i compagni e particolarmente verso i giovani che sono entrati nel movimento (principalmente, anche se non tutti, attraverso il nostro partito). Sono queste giovani forze che costituiscono la speranza del futuro*\(^27\).

Laurie Aarons mentioned that some young, very active but inexperienced Italian communists, such as Franco Schiavoni from Melbourne and Emilio Ciambotti from Sydney, were willing to work with and for the CPA\(^28\).

**The visits of Giuliano Pajetta and Ignazio Salemi**

In 1973, the PCI realized that its main branch in Sydney was indeed stuck in the mud of ideological rows, personal disputes and organisational incompetence. The launch in Australia of the independent federation had turned out to be far from successful. If the situation
appeared better in Melbourne, in Sydney it was critical, while in Adelaide serious doubts were expressed about the branch’s real functionality. The overall membership of the three branches had stagnated, remaining around one hundred. The PCI thus decided to send delegates on two official visits to Australia: Giuliano Pajetta in April-May 1973 and Ignazio Salemi in September-November of that year.

Giuliano Pajetta toured Australia for two weeks, arriving in time to participate in the First PCI National Conference (or Third IPCIF Congress), organized by the IPCIF and the CPA in Sydney on 20 and 21 April 197329. The conference was an instrument to Pajetta’s attempts to reorganize the IPCIF. The thorniest issue, as already mentioned, was the conduct of the executive committee of the IPCIF, whose results were reputed to be unsatisfactory30. Eventually, a resolution was reached at the conference to disband the executive committee of the IPCIF and replace it with two comitati di sezione (branch committees), one in Sydney and one in Melbourne.

Pajetta’s visit did not result in a mere streamlining of the organisation’s structure, but aimed at training the membership, as well as popularising the PCI’s emigration policy within the Italian-Australian community31. For this purpose, four meetings were organized between the Sydney and Melbourne committees, attended by some five hundred people, mainly communists and communist-supporters32. For Pajetta, the high number of participants in the meetings was tangible evidence that pressure from the migrant mass was mounting significantly, particularly from young people. On other occasions, he noticed signs of an increasingly favourable attitude towards communists that gave him the impression that the anti-communist feelings in Australian society were slowly dissolving33. In the light of the new socio-political situation in Australia, with Labor in office, Pajetta acknowledged that the possibilities for developing the PCI organisations in the country were greater than ever before. Italian migrants had shown a vivid interest in participating in migrant lobby groups, parties, and associations, but none of these organisations, according to Pajetta, were at that stage realistically able to tackle their problems or even understand them. He saw a great opportunity for the PCI to fill the gap. Furthermore, the Labor government showed a carefully encouraging attitude towards the migrants’ initiatives, even though wider political and union sectors were still firmly opposed to the sharing of power with the migrants34. Although more receptive and well-disposed towards the migrants’ needs than Labor, the CPA
was largely unfamiliar to the wider public, and did not constitute a sizeable pressure group, its already slight political importance being further reduced by internal divisions.\(^{35}\)

Pajetta came to the conclusion that a possible re-launch of the PCI in Australia had to grounded in an “qualitative shift”\(^{36}\). In practice, having realised that there were no culturally and politically prepared cadres in Australia that could build a bridge to the mass of Italian-Australians, the PCI opted to send one of its cadres from Italy. Although the PCI in Australia would have been able to mobilise dozens of willing Italian-speaking activists, these were considered culturally and politically ill-prepared. Only a well-formed cadre could fulfil the duty of “mass leader” and convincingly transmit his knowledge to others.

The qualified activist chosen to develop the attività di massa on the Australian continent was Ignazio Salemi. Salemi was a versatile and experienced PCI official who was a former correspondent of L’Unità and of the Italian-speaking PCI radio stations in Budapest and Prague.\(^{37}\) At the time, Salemi was editor of Emigrazione, the periodical of FILEF Rome.

Salemi’s visit to Australia lasted about six weeks, from the end of September to the middle of November 1973, and his ‘mission’, like that of his predecessors, was to observe and report on the conditions of Italian migrants in Australia. As Emigrazione editor, he was also officially invited to attend the first Migrant Workers’ Conferences (MWCs) in Melbourne and Sydney. As attendee of both MWCs, Salemi carefully noted down of his impressions:

\[ A \text{ Melbourne vi è stata una vera e propria partecipazione degli immigrati, regolarmente delegati da fabbriche e comunità, e assai larga è stata la partecipazione dal basso al dibattito; a Sydney è stata invece una Conferenza sull’Emigrazione con relazioni e discorsi dall’alto e una scarsa partecipazione del mondo dell’emigrazione vero e proprio. La rappresentanza italiana, comunque, è stata la più numerosa.}^{38}\]

Besides attending these conferences, Salemi met with local communist and labour officials, trade unionists, and Italian migrant workers in factories and on building sites. He saw, particularly in Melbourne, a broad participation of Australian communists in political and trade union sectors, including in local city councils, often supporting the initiatives of the Italian communists who presented themselves under the FILEF banner and under the leadership of Giovanni Sgrò.\(^{40}\)
He also witnessed what he saw as signs of an emerging Italian-Australian Left: the involvement of FILEF in the MWC’s committees, the petition against the closure of the last two sea lines between Italy and Australia, and the meetings about the debate regarding the international migrants charter proposed by FILEF Rome. In his opinion, these commitments positively prevented the Italian-Australian communists from becoming bogged down in “polemiche sterili fra filosovietismo, filomaoismo, troskismo, ecc. che abbondano in tutti i vari schieramenti della sinistra australiana” (futile debates on filo Sovietism, Maoism, Trotskyism, and so on, that thrive in the Australian Left). 41

Likewise, Salemi made a positive impression on many Italians in Australia, and many agreed that he was what FILEF and the PCI needed at the time: an activist with “great intellectual capacity combined with excellent organisational skills” 42. Thus, FILEF Melbourne asked its central office and the PCI in Rome to charge him with the task of co-ordinating the organisation’s activities in Australia.

Conclusion

The establishment of the PCI in Australia in 1971 sparked enthusiasm among local Italian communists, who saw their political and cultural values represented by a party more familiar than the CPA. Yet isolationism, factionalism and lack of organisational capability played a decisive role in keeping the PCI in Australia an insignificant socio-political body. The visits of Pajetta and Salemi in 1973 took note of the rapidly changing political circumstances in the country and encouraged a qualitative shift within the organisation. Simultaneously, FILEF Melbourne emerged as a viable organisation for left-wing Italians, with the potential to play a better and more prominent role than the PCI. With the arrival of Salemi in 1974, it embarked on a new journey, organising string of new activities, becoming an effective and vocal organisation, and forming the gateway for left-wing Italians into mainstream politics.

Notes to Chapter 5

1 The 1956 Khrushchev revelations of Stalin’s crimes sparked off an ideological dispute between the CPSU and the Communist Party of China (CFC) over the argument of which of the two
parties was most faithfully interpreting the Marxist-Leninist principles. The CFC accused the
CPSU of “revisionism” of the original communist doctrine, while the former blamed the latter for
fomenting a split in the international communist movement. The dispute culminated in 1960 with
the split of the international communist movement and saw the establishment of Peking as a
second “Rome” vying with the Moscovite “Rome” as the true centre of authority for the
communist movement (Davidson 1969: 147).
2 The Sino-Soviet dispute ended the subordination of all the communist parties outside of the
USSR to the aim of building and defending socialism. As soon as “it became apparent that it was
equally possible to ‘build socialism’ in China, Italy or Britain … in the early 1950s all the
communist parties adopted the “Our-land Road to Socialism” as their national program” (Blunden
1993).
3 The PCI’s *via italiana al socialismo* (Italian road to socialism) involved a declaration that the
party had permanently given up the radical idea of realizing a soviet-style state in Italy and
claimed an autonomous way to bring about socialism in the country, which included acceptance
of the principle of party pluralism and the renunciation of any non-democratic means of political
control.
5 See, for instance, D. Novelli, ‘Sedici ore di lavoro ogni giorno nel deserto’, *L’Unità*, [October
6 D. Novelli, ‘Nota per ufficio di segreteria (Pecchioli) – Viaggio in Australia’, Turin, 6 September
1971, AGIF, PCI Collection: busta 4141, fogli 118-23.
7 Ibid.
8 Novelli recommended to the party headquarters in Rome that he makes sure it regularly delivered
the party’s press statements to the migrants. See D. Novelli, ‘Nota per ufficio di segreteria
(Pecchioli) – Viaggio in Australia”, Turin, 6 September 1971, AGIF, PCI Collection: busta 4141,
fogli 118-23.
9 Ibid.
10 D. Novelli, ‘Nota per ufficio di Segreteria (Pecchioli) – Viaggio in Australia’, Turin, 6 September
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 D. Novelli, ‘Lettera a Pecchioli e p.c alla Commissione Emigrazione (Gallo) e Commissione
18 Ibid.
19 L. Aarons, ‘Lettera al Comitato Centrale del PCI’, Sydney, 10 July 1972, AGIF, PCI Collection:
busta 4111, foglio 1082.
20 S. Palazzolo, ‘Rapporto del Compagno Segretario della Federazione del PCI (Australia)’, Sydney,
22 That is, to implement a policy of lobbying for the industrial demands of the Italians by organising
a new left-wing front, which included Catholic forces. See S. Palazzolo, ‘Rapporto del Compagno
Segretario della Federazione del PCI (Australia)’, Sydney, 30 July 1972, AGIF, PCI Collection:
busta 4111, fogli 1078-81.
23 S. Palazzolo, ‘Rapporto del Compagno Segretario della Federazione del PCI (Australia)’, Sydney,
28 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Before the collapse of Communism, the PCI broadcast several radio programs in the Italian language from consenting Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The purpose was to broadcast counter-propaganda to Italians, especially to those living in neighbouring West Germany.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
Chapter 6
FILEF IN MELBOURNE IN THE 1970s:
MIGRANT RIGHTS AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

The 1970s was a decade of fervent activism for FILEF Melbourne. FILEF was involved in a number of campaigns, rallies, initiatives and activities that took “into account the needs most strongly felt by Italian migrant workers”1. FILEF activism stretched into various sectors, from press to politics, and touched several issues, from migrant rights to the teaching of migrant languages. This chapter examines some noteworthy initiatives and activities which marked FILEF activism during this period: the publication of Nuovo Paese, the FILEF-FEC social survey, the participation in the migrant and welfare rights movements, the establishment of a federally-funded welfare rights office, the rallies for the re-election of the Whitlam government and the election of Sgrò to the Victorian Parliament.

The establishment of FILEF in Melbourne, 1972-1973

Factors favouring the establishment and development of FILEF in Melbourne in the course of the 1970s are to be found in both the Italian and local (Australian) historical contexts. The pro-emigrant politics of the Italian Left in the 1960s (see Chapter 2) prompted a renewed interest of political parties and trade unions on the welfare of the Italian migrants overseas, which in turn favoured the establishment of politically-inspired migrant organisations, such us FILEF. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), which enjoyed with FILEF a close relationship and whose militants played a key role in FILEF’s activities, was particularly keen to see FILEF, viewed as its de facto appendage in the migrant world, develop. In Australia, it was Salemi to see in FILEF, rather than the Australian-based PCI cells and branches, the political potential for local Italian communists.
During his first visit to Australia, Salemi sensed that the times were ripe for the development of the Italian communists' attività di massa in Australia. In Melbourne, Italian communists were lobbying local city councils on issues such as schooling, childcare centres, roads and so on. In Sydney, they organised meetings and assemblies on issues concerning the migrant workers' problems. According to Salemi, these activities had the merit of keeping Italian communists united, at least on an organisational level. He thus concluded that:

E’ evidente che lavorando più in profondità con i problemi reali degli emigranti in quanto tali e, soprattutto degli emigranti operai (le condizioni di lavoro nelle fabbriche sono veramente gravi) vi sono non solo possibilità grandi di allargamento della ora ridotta platea di iscritti al PCI, ma anche di mobilitazioni più larghe che coinvolgano anche qualche sindacato. Penso che con una buona attività si possa in breve tempo raddoppiare o triplicare il numero degli iscritti e superare anche la attuale capacità contributiva in senso finanziario in modo da essere in grado di prendere qualche iniziativa più vistosa, partecipare in proprio a certe campagne, sviluppare una certa attività di massa.

The development of attività di massa implied the presence of an organismo di massa, which could launch and co-ordinate activities such as those described. But the IPCIF had proved not to be up to the task, nor was the LIA, which was very much plagued by internal divisions and whose activities were limited organising to dinner dances and May Day marches (Caputo 1980b: 8). The establishment of a brand new organismo di massa was considered a sound solution. This was an idea already aired by Novelli in 1971, when he proposed the constitution of a left-wing federation of Italian workers. By the time Salemi first came to Australia, a new organismo di massa had already been functioning in Melbourne since 1972: FILEF.

FILEF Melbourne was established on 6 July 1972, during a meeting at the house of Giovanni Sgrò in North Coburg. During that meeting, a FILEF Committee was elected: Umberto Frattali (President), Franco Schiavoni (Vice-President), Giovanni Sgrò (Secretary), Patrizia Archivio (Vice-Secretary), Assunto Colli (Treasurer), Ferdinando Butera (Legal Advisor), Garce Masini, Armando Ceccaroni, and Domenico Fammartino (Committee Members).
According to Caputo, who joined FILEF in late 1972, Fammartino was the one who first introduced FILEF to Australia (Caputo 1980a: 52; Brunswick City Council and Brunswick Oral History Project 1985: 90; Caputo 1980b: 8)\(^9\). An Italian-born shop steward of the North Melbourne Railway Workshop and a CPA member, Fammartino made a trip to Italy in early 1972. In Rome as a CPA delegate, he had met with Pajetta and had learnt about the existence of FILEF\(^10\). After his return to Australia, he encouraged fellow Italians to set up a FILEF branch in Melbourne. Among the people he approached was Sgrò, who was invited by Fammartino to get in contact with Giuliano Pajetta and Gaetano Volpe, secretary of FILEF Rome. Sgrò was authorised to hold meetings at his house under the banner of FILEF\(^11\).

Notwithstanding the Italian (PCI) connection, a decisive factor for the establishment and early development of FILEF is to be found in the Australian political and social context. As recalled by Caputo, the Labor victory of December 1972 had created “in tutto il paese un clima di ottimismo” (a feeling of optimism in the country), which brought to FILEF ‘questo vento fresco’ [che] ci ha dato l’opportunità di uscire dalle tane e operare in maniera diversa” (a breath of fresh air, which gave us the opportunity to emerge from underground and do things in the open). Yet, FILEF did not have the financial resources to begin work or obtain a proper office, and meetings continued to be held at Sgrò’s house. Neither did FILEF set an agenda of activities, beyond the regular monthly meetings (Caputo 1980b: 8).

Decisive for the fortunes of FILEF was the financial and organisational help provided by the Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre (FEC), whose activists Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer had established contact with Sgrò. In 1972, activists of the FEC were “interested in establishing a left-wing Italian organisation” in Melbourne, as they regarded COASIT as “right-wing and conservative” (Lopez 2000: 148). When Sgrò invited Faulkner and Storer to a FILEF meeting, they “[…] were impressed by the size of the meeting, over a hundred people, and saw the potential to establish a viable organisation” (ibid.: 149). Later that year, the FEC diverted some of the funds received from the Ross Trust to conduct a study of Italians in Coburg, and established a FILEF office at 34-36 Munro Street, Coburg, “to provide a base from which pressure-group activity could be mounted” (ibid.).

FILEF’s activities effectively started in 1973. In April-June 1973, FILEF activists, among whom were Joe Caputo and Franco Schiavoni, attended a series of seminars organised by the FEC (Carli 1982: 25; Caputo 1980a: 52). These seminars imparted to their participants the
concept that “migrant rights had to be claimed by migrants, on their own behalf, instead of depending on the paternalism of the Australian community” (Martin 1978: 196). The debates that originated from these seminars resulted in a valuable publication, edited by Storer, that encapsulated the ethnic rights ideology from a grass-roots perspective: *Ethnic rights, power, and participation: toward a multi-cultural Australia* (1975). Schiavoni contributed to it with a paper titled ‘The future shape of Australian society’ (1975), in which he carefully singled out examples of ‘devaluation’ of migrant cultures in Australian society, with its deeply ingrained assimilationist tendencies.

In June-October 1973, FILEF was involved in the committee that organised the first Migrant Workers’ Conference (MWC), which “[…] was the first attempt ever to bring [ethnic] groups together” (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 103). The MWC saw the participation of representatives of “fifteen unions, two regional Trades and Labour Councils and the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC)” (Lopez 2000: 289). The delegates were mainly from non-English-speaking backgrounds, “elected from various workshops around Melbourne, […] shop stewards involved for a long time in their particular industries”; trade union officials from non-English-speaking backgrounds could be counted “on the fingers of one hand” (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 103). Conference proceedings were conducted in several languages other than English (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 154).

Caputo, who was on the organising committee of the MWC, recalled some hostility during the preparation for the MWC from Australians, who were fearful that conferences such as the MWC could lead to a split in the Australian Trade Union Movement (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 105). Only a short time earlier, migrant militants had defied union officials during the renowned strike at the Broadmeadows Ford vehicle plant, which had caused clashes at the gates when the union declared a return to work. “That strike typified – Caputo recalled – the gap between migrant workers and trade union leadership, even the best trade union leadership, in this country” (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 105).

At the MWC the growing tension, which had erupted in violence exerted by migrants from within the Australian Trade Union Movement, was articulated in a set of proposals for union action and support (Martin 1978: 200), summarized by Lever-Tracy and Quinlan:
Conference resolutions generally centred upon demands for improved wages and working conditions, the recognition of immigrant skills, special provisions for overseas leave and guaranteed job security for injured workers. Unions were called on to establish immigrant workers committee, elect immigrant organisers, conduct multilingual office staff. Other demands included the mounting of union claims for paid English classes at work and child-care facilities together with the proposal in the sphere of welfare, education and culture aimed at securing equality for immigrants (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 153-54).

After the two MWC, conferences, debates on migrant issues and interpreting facilities were initiated inside the unions (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 105). The Victorian leadership of the Amalgamated Metal Workers’ Union (AMWU), together with some other trade unions, offered support and provided office space and funds for a Trade Union Migrant Workers’ Centre at its Melbourne headquarters (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988: 154).

Nuovo Paese

Easily “mistaken for one of the many combative and workerist papers that emerged in Italy after the 1968 student movement” (Carli 1982: 27), Nuovo Paese was an effective means of broadcasting FILEF’s activities and initiatives, as well as left-wing political thinking. Launched in May 1974, Nuovo Paese was perhaps the first major, visible initiative that FILEF undertook in Australia. The closing-down in the 1960s of what can be considered its predecessor, Il Nuovo Paese, the periodical of the LIA, left them without a locally produced paper reflecting their views and reporting their issues.

Already towards the end of the 1960s, attempts had been made to launch a newspaper that could offer an alternative to Il Globo and La Fiamma. There had been rumours for some time that a newspaper called Nuovo Paese or Nuova Era might be published by Italian and Australian communists in a joint venture; yet mistrust between the two had condemned the project, as Diego Novelli noted down in the report of his 1971 visit to Australia.¹²

Novelli thought, during his visit, that the publication of a periodical would be beneficial and saw an opportunity for the PCI to run its editing directly. He stated confidently: “[…] il primo numero del giornale che dovrà uscire per i primi di Ottobre lo curo direttamente da
Torino e manderò i fotolito in Australia, dal No 2 (per novembre) questo lavoro dovrà essere curato da Roma (Stampa e Propaganda con la commissione emigrazione) (the first issue of the periodical, which must be published by early October, will be supervised by myself directly from Turin. I will then send the photolytic to Australia. From the second [November] issue onwards the job needs to be taken over by the Press and Propaganda Committee in Rome)\textsuperscript{13}.

In the months to come, however, the proposal became caught up in the political and personal disputes between the Independent PCI Federation (IPCIF) and the CPA. In 1972, the CPA National Secretary, Laurie Aarons vented all his frustration to Giuliano Pajetta about the “[…] continuing delay in the publication of the newspaper, although we have guaranteed the necessary finance to produce the first three issues. Our latest information is that the newspaper is to be printed in Melbourne, and there has been no further discussion with us since we received the letter dated August 7th [1972], informing us of this fact\textsuperscript{14}.

The idea of publishing a periodical was raised once again in 1973. The First PCI National Conference (or Third IPCIF Congress) in April of this year entrusted the Italian communists of Sydney with the task of launching, editing and distributing a periodical\textsuperscript{15}. Yet, it was Salemi, during his visit to Australia in September to November, who gave encouragement by backing the idea to involve Australian trade unions rather than the CPA. The CPA-affiliated Amalgamated Metal Workers’ Union (AMWU) in particular expressed interest in financing the enterprise by bulk buying five or six thousand copies of the paper for their Italian-language members. Salemi wrote in his travel notes:

\textit{Sia a Melbourne che a Sydney i compagni hanno posto la necessità di un giornale in italiano che si differenzi da quelli esistenti attualmente in Australia e che sia oltre che uno strumento di propaganda anche uno strumento di organizzazione. Tale esigenza è abbastanza sentita anche dai compagni australiani ed è stata recepita in modo concreto soprattutto dai compagni australiani di Melbourne i quali, attraverso un sindacato abbastanza grosso, quello dei metallurgici, hanno anche assunto impegni per un finanziamento che copra le spese di stampa di un quindicinale a quattro pagine per una tiratura di diecimila copie, finanziamento inteso come prepagamento di 5 o 6 mila copie del giornale stesso che dovrebbero essere distribuite fra gli operai italiani iscritti al sindacato che si è assunto l’impegno. Resta da costruire, a Melbourne e nel resto dell’Australia, la rete di “amici” per la distribuzione e la vendita delle copie restanti e per lo sviluppo del giornale in modo da assicurare
una crescita sia in relazione alla tiratura, che al numero delle pagine e alla frequenza in uscita. Le
premesse ci sono ma è evidente che un obiettivo di questo genere richiede un intenso lavoro.\footnote{16}

As laid out in Chapter 6, Salemi returned to Australia in March 1974 and an agreement with
five trade unions was eventually reached to support the publication of \textit{Nuovo Paese}.\footnote{17} He
encountered great enthusiasm among left-wing Italians for the endeavour, which can be seen
as highlighting their greatly felt need for their own periodical:

[...] C’è stato un episodio molto incoraggiante. Io appena arrivato in Australia avevo cominciato a
pensare a queste cose e un giorno mi è venuto a trovare – e non era neanche il mio indirizzo, io ero
ospite – un gruppo di persone, di veneti di Mildura, insieme ad certo colonnello Simoni (on this
figure see Cresciani 2003: 115). [...] Questi vennero da me: “Sai, noi abbiamo sentito dire che c’è
uno che vuole fare un giornale dei lavoratori per il partito laburista... Noi abbiamo fatto una
sottoscrizione fra noi e l’abbiamo portata”. Da Mildura venire a Melbourne a cercarmi, insomma,
con trecento e ottanta dollari che allora non erano uno scherzo, mi ricordo che l’aereo Melbourne-
Sydney erano trenta dollari. Era parecchio per quei tempi.\footnote{18}

Salemi’s journalistic experience (see Chapter 5) was essential to fill what Caputo indicated as
the intellectual gap among Italian communists. This had proved to be not only the main
impediment for the launch and editing of a new periodical, but also for undertaking more
wide-ranging initiatives:

Il problema nostro era questo. [...] Fino al 1970 gli unici attivisti che avevamo, i più preparati, erano
Deleidi e il sottoscritto, ma io a livello italiano, ancora oggi ho delle inibizioni, delle difficoltà,
perché la mia istruzione non è stata fatta in Italia. Tutto il mio italiano è autodidatta, leggendo sui
libri, sulla rivista, sul giornale. Noi non avevamo avuto mai un gruppo di persone ben preparate a
livello intellettuale, nemmeno degli intellettuali organici dal punto di vista gramsciano. E allora
sentivamo questa lacuna. Quei pochi che avevamo come Deleidi, che scrive anche un pò di italiano,
non è che avevano un grande intellettuale, non avevamo la capacità di grandi riflessioni. La ragione
perché nella sinistra eravamo nella posizione che eravamo era perché non avevamo le capacità
intellettuali e le risorse umane. Quei pochi che avevamo s’erano stati allontanati. [...] Ritornando
alla FILEF, Salemi aveva quello che a noi mancava. Aveva la capacità d’un attivista, era dinamico,
nel senso che riusciva ad inventare delle attività, ma aveva anche la capacità di analizzare la
Eventually, *Nuovo Paese* was purposely launched on the International Labour Day, the first of May and bore the catching sub-heading ‘learn to recognize your rights’. In its first editorial, *Nuovo Paese* elucidated its mission: “to fill the vacuum of the lack of information regarding the struggle and the successes of local workers, and of other countries that constitute the reality of this world – of which even Australia is part*. *Nuovo Paese* aspired to make its readers aware that the working classes in Italy and Europe in general were successfully having their demands fulfilled at the time and that the lack of adequate information in Australia about these successes contributed to maintain “[…] privilegi e modi di vita che sono veramente ormai, nel 1974, di un altro mondo” (privileges and life styles that indeed are, by 1974 standards, of another era).

*Nuovo Paese* republished news items from *L’Unità* and informing about local Labor and trade union initiatives, dedicating, again, extensive space to the coverage of struggles of the Italian workers’ rights movement and its powerful bargaining power during union disputes, taking it as a role model for local union actions. In this way, the paper offered an alternative source of information to the Italian-Australian community.

According to Brennan Wales (1988: 136), *Nuovo Paese* was in comparison to *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma*, more abreast with the times and more in tune with multicultural Australia by including a higher percentage of news items dedicated to local and international issues. In a survey he conducted on the news content of *Il Globo*, *La Fiamma*, and *Nuovo Paese* he concluded the latter was by far more committed to covering Australian, Italian and international news, and far less sport and local Italian migrant clubs news oriented.

Moreover, *Nuovo Paese* contained the highest percentage (20%) of news items in English, compared to *Il Globo* (5%) and *La Fiamma* (3%). Wales argued that while *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma* essentially offered news items in English for second-generation Italian-Australians who were less familiar with the Italian language, *Nuovo Paese*’s purpose was to expand its readership beyond the Italian-speaking community, distributing the newspaper in factories and the like.
In February 1977, *Nuovo Paese* added four more pages, thus expanding from an initial volume of eight to twelve pages. Its editors proudly stated that “[...] il modesto quindicinale dei lavoratori, erede di altri tentativi sfortunati del passato, ha superato la prova della stabilità e ora cresce di misura” (the unpretentious workers’ weekly, successor of ill-fated ones, successfully passed the test of time and it is now about to grow)\(^{24}\). Twelve unions in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland were by now distributing it and in Melbourne, it was also sold, for fifteen cents, in ten milk bars, five bar/restaurants, three shops and one newsagency.

Nevertheless, *Nuovo Paese* failed to become a widely read newspaper and could not compete with the commercially oriented *La Fiamma* and *Il Globo*, despite offering more news and being distributed by dozens of trade unions. During the First FILEF National Congress of October 1977, its editor at the time, Umberto Martinengo, explained why: *La Fiamma* and *Il Globo* sold approximately 30,000 and 15,000 copies a week respectively, *Nuovo Paese* only approximately 6,000 copies a fortnight\(^{25}\). Due to its limited circulation, *Nuovo Paese* also attracted fewer classified advertisements, the majority of which were linked to FILEF members owning their own businesses. For example, five of the six classified of *Nuovo Paese* in February 1977 were paid by FILEF members: “Pizza Restaurant Edelweiss” by Tom Diele, “Cleaning Service” by Vincenzo Mammoliti, “Frattali’s Designing Services” by Umberto Frattali, “Ladies Hairdresser of Frank di Roma” by Frank Lugarini.

Although *Nuovo Paese* began to obtain funding from the Italian government through the Italian Commission for the Italian Press Abroad from 1978 onwards, it was run almost exclusively on a voluntarily basis, with a network of distribution essentially maintained by volunteers. In 1978, Umberto Martinengo, who held *Nuovo Paese*’s editorship between 1976 and 1978 (he then became a *La Fiamma* correspondent) pointed out that the distribution process left much to be desired:

Oggi, la situazione, seppure migliorata rispetto a qualche tempo fa, è ancora insoddisfacente, almeno per quanto riguarda Melbourne: solo pochissimi compagni partecipano al processo di distribuzione, e si riescono a toccare solo pochissimi punti di vendita, mentre il potenziale è enorme e
in gran parte inesplorato. Anche per quanto riguarda le Unioni, non sono molte quelle che lo distribuiscono nelle fabbriche: molto spesso, lo comprano e lo lasciano negli uffici delle segretarie.  

Martinengo also recalled that “[...] l’orientamento di Roma era quello di non procedere verso un potenziamento del giornale ma semmai verso un suo ridimensionamento” (Rome’s strategy for the paper was essentially to reduce its circulation). Stefano de Pieri, Nuovo Paese’s editor between 1978 and 1980, stressed that working for Nuovo Paese was to a large degree a labour of love. Financially, Nuovo Paese could cover editing and printing costs but was able to retain little for individual salaries.

With the departure of Martinengo in 1978 and de Pieri in 1980, Cira La Gioia, a graduate from Apulia who migrated in the late 1970s, became the new Nuovo Paese’s editor until 1983, when the editor office was transferred to Sydney. In 1986, Nuovo Paese became monthly. Since 1989, Frank Barbaro from the FILEF office of Adelaide has edited Nuovo Paese.

In the 1970s, Nuovo Paese played a significant role in the Italian-Australian press and probably beyond, for its strong focus on advocating the migrants’ cause, for portraying a rather controversial image of the migrants’ life in Australia, and for attempting to raise the cultural level of the community by promoting engagement with contemporary cultural products from Italy. Its stance diverged from that of the Melbourne-based Il Globo. By analysing Il Globo’s ideological and cultural roles, Carli pinpointed the profoundly different approach to news reporting between Il Globo and Nuovo Paese:

Il Globo has consistently presented Italians with a quite distorted picture of Italy. Italy in its pages has been presented as crisis ridden, with many of the articles on Italy being the so-called “cronaca nera”, that is stories of rapes, assaults, murders, terrorism and scandals. It has fostered an image of Italy which altogether neglects the positive social and political changes which have occurred in the period since the Italians emigrated. Yet while Italy and the rest of the world are presented as areas of unrest, the Italians in Australia are presented as living an idyllic and peaceful existence (Carli 1982: 29).

Carli’s argument was that Il Globo, by expressing the tenet of its owner the Valmorbida family, who stood for the Italian-Australian establishment for him, presented a conservative
yet unrealistic portrayal of the Italian-Australian community, one in which the community was to be seen as “well-established, successful and unified” (Carli 1982: 30). Conversely, *Nuovo Paese*, and FILEF, were keen to present a less edifying representation of the community, one that took into account a working-class viewpoint.

**Migrant rights: the FILEF-FEC social survey and the welfare office.**

The 1970s saw the politicising of migrant issues and welfare in Australia. In Melbourne, the Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre (FEC) emerged as one of the main active organisations of the ethnic rights movement, which – along the lines of the American civil rights movement – lobbied for the recognition of migrant rights, the implementation of migrant-suited welfare services, and the safeguarding of migrant cultures. Headed by Brian Howe, a young left-wing Methodist minister, the FEC produced an agenda for social action and change (Howe 1974: 1), which drew inspiration from the Chicago Urban Research Centres and “other concepts of community mobilisation and clerical involvement in social reform” (Lopez 2000: 135).

One of FEC’s top objectives was to study and critically analyse urban social relations, particularly those in inner city of Melbourne (Howe 1974: 1). The FEC itself based in the migrant-populated northern inner suburb of Fitzroy. It recognised that migrant involvement in civic affairs was “crucial for any real progress towards social justice in the city” (*ibid.*: 2) and that only research and action programs could shift this “serious imbalance” in participation and control of community organisation (*ibid.*). The discovery of Giovanni Sgrò and FILEF in its neighbourhood (see Chapter 6) led the FEC to propose a social survey on some hundred Italian families living in the Coburg-Brunswick area.

Planning had begun in 1972 and the survey was carried out between May and December 1974. According to Storer (1979: 290; Storer 1974: 8) and Howe (1974: 2), the survey was groundbreaking. Not only was it entirely devised and implemented by FILEF members, that is at a very grassroots level, thus at a very grassroots level, but it also, for the first time in Australia, gave resources to a migrant group to carry out research with the aim of “achieving social and political change” (Howe 1974: 2). The survey focused on a whole range of issues: settlement, occupation, income, education, participation and representation in decision-
making processes, perception of use of existing social structures and services (Storer 1979: 290). It aspired to evaluate how Italians who were living in this area perceived their socio-economic conditions and status, and subsequently “[...] elaborare un piano di richieste alle autorità locali, statali e centrali per allegere il peso di tutti quei problemi che [...] costituiscono insieme il problema dell’emigrazione” (to articulate a list of demands to be put forward to local, state and federal authorities so to ease the burden of all those issues deriving from the complex issue of emigration) 30.

Completed in late 1974, the survey was first published in Nuovo Paese on 6 February 1975. It concluded that Italian migrants were economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged and discriminated against compared to the Australian population, confirming the findings of the 1970 Henderson Commission of Enquiry into Poverty. At trade union and political level, Italians were poorly represented and the tiny but vocal minority actively involved in trade union and political activities had been refused Australian citizenship several times and was hence excluded from mainstream politics (Storer 1979: 297-98).

The publication of the survey stirred up the local press31, and caused protests by the Victorian Hamer government, which denied any claims of discrimination against Italian school children in Victorian state schools32. When the survey was also tabled at the First World Conference on Italian Immigration in Rome in late February 1975, conservative quarters aroused even louder complaints and questioned the survey’s findings33.

Despite the polemics it sparked, the survey laid bare the fact that the great majority of the people interviewed (over 80%) hardly ever used community facilities and welfare services such as, day nurseries, kindergartens, elderly citizens clubs, home help services, meals on wheels, child endowment, sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, maternity allowance benefits, mental health services, legal services, child welfare or youth clubs (Storer 1979: 300). While more than half of the interviewees stated that they did not feel the need to use such services or claim such benefits, 20% were not aware of their existence and 10% failed to use them because of the language barrier or because they “found officials to be rude” (ibid.). Many wished to be better informed (in Italian) and better represented (by a local Italian-run organisation lobbying for their rights and embodying their views).

Cathy Angelone and Ignazio Salemi recalled that up until then many migrants simply thought they were not entitled to basic rights:
ANGELONE: Fino ad allora la parola ‘rights’ non esisteva; non esisteva nel senso che io emigrato italiano o greco vengo da te che sei il mio padrone e non ti dico: ‘Questo è il mio diritto...’; ma: ‘Potresti per cortesia...’.

SALEMI: Arrivavi all’ultima settimana di lavoro prima del diritto al benefit, e ti licenziavano per non darti il benefit.

ANGELONE: Lui si riferisce, dopo quindici anni di lavoro in una determinata fabbrica, tu hai diritto a sei mesi di paga...

SALEMI: ...Non solo questo, ma anche la pensione, i diritti. Spesso e volentieri a due settimane dalla scadenza ti licenziavano, ma questo molto diffuso e quindi perdevi tutti i diritti. Ma tu sai quante lotte abbiamo fatto per cambiare queste cose? Ché anche sindacati australiani non è che ci ponevano molta attenzione a questo.

ANGELONE: Non gli importava più di tanto. Poi la questione dei diritti non era soltanto a livello di chi lavorava, ma anche dei pensionati, della gente che era disoccupata, o della gente che era in malattia e così via. Farsi rispettare. Per esempio, so che ho diritto a ricevere il mio assegno ogni due settimane, e non mi arriva, vengo da te e ti chiedo: “Ditemi che cosa è che devo fare”, oppure, “io mi trovo in questa situazione adesso, ho sentito dire che c’è questo sussidio che danno, che devo fare?”, a questi livelli eravamo.

With Labor in office (late 1972), there was nonetheless “a shift in social welfare thinking from a perception of welfare benefits and services as privileges, to a recognition that people had social rights” (Sandford 1977: v). At the time, ethnic rights activists successfully lobbied the Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden, to have one of their central policies included in the government’s agenda: “the establishment of welfare rights workers to inform ethnic communities of their rights and organise pressure groups to pursue those rights” (Lopez 2000: 267).

By 1974, a Welfare Rights Officers Program was articulated and ready for implementation. FILEF was amongst five Victorian recipient organisations of the program, each granted $10,000 for a period of twelve months. It was a pioneering program in which “the welfare rights workers became involved in a broad range of activities and new
activities” (Sandford 1977: 3). FILEF opened a welfare office on its premises in Coburg in November 1974 and employed Cathy Angelone as Welfare Rights Officer35.

Migrants of all sorts of nationalities came in significant numbers from the surrounding areas to the office, as Devva Kasnitz, an American student who volunteered with FILEF, recalls in a paper presented at the First FILEF National Congress of 197736. In 1975 alone, it dealt with more that 2000 cases37. While it was not the only organisation involved in social welfare assistance for Italians (COASIT had been operating since 1967), FILEF was probably one of the few whose welfare activities formed an integral part of its general political activities38, and this caused some frictions with the Department of Social Security. For Angelone there were conceptual differences between FILEF and the Social Security Department:

*Perhaps the major obstacle confronted by this program was that of the differing concepts of welfare rights held by our organisation and the Department. The major principle or concept from which we direct our activities is that people have to acquire total consciousness of all their legal rights. The Department however, directs its activities from the point of view of entitlements, attempting at times to limit what is a right (Angelone 1977: 64).*

As it will be examined in more detail in Chapter 7, the department then re-allocated the FILEF funding to another organisation from 1977 onwards. This did not mark, however, the demise of the FILEF welfare services which received a $5,000 grant from the Social Security Department in July 1976, and a $3,000 grant-in-aid from the Fitzroy City Council to open a welfare office at the Social Planning Office in Fitzroy in February 1977.

**Pro-ALP initiatives and the state election of Giovanni Sgrò**

While the progressive atmosphere brought about by the Whitlam government considerably aided FILEF’s activities (Halevi 1989: 225), it also brought FILEF closer to the ALP. FILEF after all embodied all the characteristics of a pro-Labor organisation. The then working-class suburb of Coburg, where the FILEF welfare office was later located, was a long-standing
ALP stronghold. It had a high migrant concentration, which was largely comprised of Italians, the majority of whom were believed to be Labor sympathisers.

Under Labor, FILEF secured funding as well as gained public legitimacy. When FILEF Melbourne was established, Sgrò quickly sought to affiliate it with the ALP. Given its close connection with the PCI, FILEF’s affiliation with the ALP avoided any potentially damaging actions which would have led to a blacklisting by the Labor Party. On the other hand, the Labor Party found in FILEF an organisation with a significant influence in its Italian constituency, and with a potentially high degree of consensus that had only been achieved by the extra-party organisation Club Italo-Australiano del Lavoro (CIAL) in the early 1960s. Party leaders and Labor ministers used FILEF as a platform for a better delivery of their policies. This was the case, for instance, for the bi-lingual leaflet of the public speech on Labor’s health and welfare policy delivered by the Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden at the Fitzroy Town Hall on 1 May 1974. This brochure was printed and distributed by FILEF among Italian workers.

Yet it was during elections that the ties between FILEF and the ALP predictably tightened. During federal election campaigns, Nuovo Paese published extensively articles and advertisements supporting Labor and Labor candidates. For the occasion of the May 1974 and December 1975 federal elections, FILEF was part of an effective Italian-run, pro-Labor propaganda machine that set up ad hoc committees. In April 1974, FILEF, along with the Lega Italo-Australiana (LIA) and a group of Italian migrant workers, established the Italian Committee for the Federal ALP Government, with the aim of supporting the ALP in the run-up to the next scheduled federal elections. The Minister for the ACT and federal member of the electorate of Wills, Gordon Bryant was the co-ordinator of the activities of the committee. A few weeks before the federal election of 18 May 1974, FILEF and the LIA also became member of another pro-Labor committee: the Italian Electoral Committee for the Re-election of the Labor Government, which was based in both Coburg and Brunswick that is, within the electorate of Wills. Once again, Bryant was appointed secretary of the electoral committee and in charge of co-ordinating the initiative to be undertaken during the election campaign.
In the 1974 federal election, Bryant was re-elected with an absolute majority of 61%, at the same time the Labor Party increased its votes by 11% in Victoria. A letter sent by Whitlam to FILEF congratulated for the support during the electoral campaign:

*I am profoundly encouraged by the support we received from the Italian community during the election and am grateful for the efforts of you and your members on the Government’s behalf. My colleagues and I fully share the aims and objectives of FILEF as you have outlined them to me.*

In November 1975, FILEF showed all its solidarity against the Whitlam dismissal (see fig. 2) and support for the following campaign. It also set up an Italian Electoral Committee–ALP, which organised a set of meetings with Italian-speaking ALP sympathisers and members and printed and distributed several bi-lingual leaflets. In addition it organised several public assemblies with local and national Labor politicians.

The link between FILEF and the ALP was particularly fostered by FILEF’s secretary Giovanni Sgrò, himself a local Labor activist. Sgrò became instrumental for of the relationship between the two organisation in a time when post-war migrants increasingly played a part in the ALP Victoria (Allan 1978: 21). The figure of Sgrò embodied the quintessential politically ambitious and successful migrant of the 1970s who managed unlike few others to climb the ladder of local politics from branch ranks to state parliament, reconciling activism for his “homeland group” with allegiance to the ALP (Allan 1978: 22). Sgrò, of humble peasant background, began his political militancy almost by accident during the 1952 Bonegilla upheaval, as discussed in Chapter 3. At Bonegilla he began to form a class-conscious view of life “to understand that many politicians and governments treat people as if they are nothing, especially if those people are immigrants” (Sgrò 2002: 43).

Having established himself in Melbourne as a painter he joined the CPA-affiliated Painters Union. In 1954, he joined the CPA, but felt he could contribute more to the Australian labour movement by joining the ALP, which he did in 1958. The event that triggered his change from Communist Party to Labor Party was his close friendship with Gordon Bryant, who took to heart Sgrò’s long-standing case of denied citizenship (Sgrò 2002: 51).
Sgrò was the first Italian-born member of the ALP Coburg branch and as he recalled in his memoirs was “warmly welcomed by the Martins, McNoltys, Browns, Unmacks, and Coxes, all of whom were active in Coburg affairs” (Sgrò 2002: 49). In the 1960s, he “became well known as a passionate and tireless campaigner on issues like the opposition to the Vietnam War” (Lopez 2000: 148). He was by then married to Anne Foster, a Labor activist and frequently opened his house to meetings and fundraising activities. By the early 1970s, Sgrò was a member of the Labor State Council and President of the Coburg branch of the ALP.

With Labor in office, Sgrò began lobbying for the creation of local ethnic branches in the party structure, “where each ethnic group could speak its own language” (Sgrò 2002: 69), in order to uncork the potential of a wider migrant party membership. Around this time, the Victorian ALP underwent a significant change of attitude towards post-war migrant participation in the party, shifting from being overtly hostile to increasingly tolerant. The turning point in Labor’s stance, as stressed by Lyle Allan (1978: 24), is represented indeed by the formation of ethnic branches in Melbourne’s inner city, such as the Italian-speaking Croxton branch and the Greek-speaking Westgarth branch.

According to Allan (1978: 24), “three developments made their existence viable. These are the federal intervention with the Victorian ALP in 1970, the decline in anti-migrant prejudice amongst ALP members, and the opening of the municipal franchise to non-naturalised migrants in Victoria in 1974”.

With the election of the Whitlam government, Sgrò was eventually granted citizenship. During the citizenship ceremony the Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, and the now Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gordon Bryant, congratulated him personally. As secretary of FILEF, he continued his activism. In September 1974, for example, he and June English, principal of the Brunswick Girls High School, disrupted the opening of the Victorian Parliament by unfurling a banner to protest against the lack of facilities in schools with a high percentage of migrant students. The turning point for Sgrò’s career came in March 1977, when he won a preselection bid for the safe seat of the Legislative Council province of Melbourne North. In May 1979 he was the first Italian-born Australian to be elected into the Victorian Parliament. This marked the high point of Sgrò’s and FILEF’s success in lobbying
in mainstream politics. Sgrò made his maiden Parliamentary speech partly in Italian to prove that Australian was indeed a multicultural society.

Conclusion

The establishment and development of FILEF in Melbourne were determined by factors one must set in both the Italian and Australian contexts. That is, on the one hand, the PCI willingness to look at FILEF as the best organisational option for its Australia-based militants when getting involved in community activities, on the other hand, the FEC interest to fund a left-wing, working-class organisation to counter the influence of middle-of-the-road, conservative COASIT in Italian-Australian welfare matters. As activities took off in the 1970s, FILEF activism laid emphasis on the need to claim rights on behalf of (working-class) Italian migrants: to have an alternative, left-wing press, to research into socio-economic issues so as to better address them, to count in the decision-making processes within and beyond the Italian-community. During the Whitlam government, FILEF enjoyed a close relationship with the ALP which appeared to be fruitfully beneficial for both: FILEF was recognised as a legitimate interlocutor, the Labor Party benefited from FILEF by receiving campaign support during elections. After 1975 and the election of the Fraser Liberal government FILEF suffered a set of setbacks which would leave a profound, long-term effect in its structure and agenda, as explained in Chapters 7 and 8.

Notes in Chapter 6

1 ‘FILEF’s 10 years of activities’, Nuovo Paese, [1982].
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
also Giovanni Sgrò, interview with author, 17 December 2002, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc
and full transcription in possession of author).
8  Ibid.
9  See also Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc
and full transcription in possession of author). Note that extracts from J. Caputo (1980), *La
questione del multiculturalismo: e noi?*, East Brunswick, Vic: unpublished typed manuscript,
have been published in J. Caputo, (1980) ‘Diritti del lavoro e pluralità delle culture’, *Emigrazione*
12 (7-8): 50-54.
10  Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and
full transcription in possession of author).
11  Giovanni Sgrò, interview with author, 17 December 2002, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and
full transcription in possession of author).
12  D. Novelli, ‘Nota per ufficio di segreteria (Pecchioli) – Viaggio in Australia’, Turin, 6 September
1971, AGIF, PCI Collection: busta 4141, fogli 118-23.
13  Ibid.
15  ‘Mozione conclusiva della conferenza delle organizzazioni del PCI in Australia del 20-21 Aprile
Collection: busta 4121, fogli 731-34.
17  Alongside the AMWU, the Miscellaneous Workers Union (MWU), the Operative Painters Union
(OPU), the Clothing Trade Union (CTU), the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, and the Meat
Workers Union (MWU) pledged to support the publication of *Nuovo Paese* and to buy it in bulk
for their Italian-language members.
18  Ignazio Salemi, interview with author, 3 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription
in possession of author).
19  Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full
transcription in possession of author).
20  Note that in Australia the equivalent of the International Labour Day is called May Day and is
celebrated every first Sunday of May.
21  ‘Australia is also part of the world’, *Nuovo Paese*, 1 May 1974.
23  According to Wales’ survey, *Nuovo Paese* dedicated 46.8%, 19.2%, and 15.4% respectively to
Australian, Italian and international news coverage. *Il Globo* on the other hand allocated for
the same type of news only 8.3%, 16.7%, and 6.3% of coverage. Sport and local migrant clubs
news, took up 1.9% and 3.8% of coverage in *Nuovo Paese*; in *Il Globo* covered these with 23.8%
and 11.9% of its content (Wales 1988: 153).
Paese’, paper no. 3 delivered at the First FILEF National Congress, October 1977, FMA.
26  U. Martinengo, ‘Relazione’, Prima Conferenza Stampa e Propaganda del PCI in Australia, 28
June 1978.
27  Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia
(minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
28  Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and
full transcription in possession of author).
29  Ibid.


Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Ignazio Salemi, interview with author, 3 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


D. Kasnitz, ‘The participation of FILEF in the Australian Welfare Rights Movement’, paper no. 9 delivered at the First FILEF National Congress, October 1977, FMA.


D. Kasnitz, ‘The participation of FILEF in the Australian Welfare Rights Movement’, paper no. 9 delivered at the First FILEF National Congress, October 1977, FMA.

‘Bi-lingual leaflet on the Labor’s Health and Welfare Policy Speech delivered by the Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden at the Fitzroy Town Hall on 1 May (1974)’, FMA.


C. La Marchesina (secretary of the ALP-Italian Electoral Committee), ‘Letter to members’, 3 December 1975, FMA.
In the middle of the 1970s, the Italian and Australian conservative quarters perceived FILEF’s fervent activism as too confrontational. A 1975 front-page article in *The Age*, known as ‘The Italian communists move in’ incident, sensationaly unveiled the FILEF-PCI connection in a fashion that heaped discredit and ambiguity on FILEF and its activities. The allegations shook the groundwork of FILEF and forced it to publicly play down the influence of the PCI component within its ranks. In the short-term, the incident, which marked FILEF as a radical, communist organisation, led to some episodes of anti-communist hysteria, including the arson attempt to the FILEF office in Coburg; in the long-term, it led to a strained relationship with the federal Fraser Liberal government.

**FILEF, a threat to conservative quarters**

FILEF aimed to jolt the political consciousness of Italian migrants in Australia into “a more advanced stage of political awareness” (Cresciani 1988b: 281). A typical example of this was the pressure FILEF exerted on Italian consulates to abide by 1967 Italian legislation, which aimed for a greater level of participation of Italian migrants in the decision-making processes concerning the funding by the Italian government of education and welfare activities¹. In the same way, FILEF exerted pressure in institutions within and beyond the Italian-Australian community for the “fostering of a ‘cultural conscience’ among Italian workers” (*ibid*.). For this reason, FILEF developed its own cultural groups which included: courses on Italian language, history, political and social movements, economics; organisation of concerts, of music and theatre groups, showing of films, and so on².
At the same time, FILEF’s activism was challenging the authority of some well-established institutions within the Italian-Australian community such as the welfare agency COASIT and the conservative newspaper *Il Globo*. COASIT was thus far “the Italian welfare voice” (Jakubowicz, Morrissey, and Palser 1984: 62), the institutional response of the Italian government to the welfare needs of Italian migrants. The allocation to FILEF of a Welfare Rights Officer Program grant in 1974 and the establishment of a welfare office created “a major crisis” for COASIT (*ibid.*: 63), and produced a more-or-less declared rivalry between the FILEF and COASIT, although according to Umberto Martinengo, who a few years after he worked in FILEF’s *Nuovo Paese* moved to COASIT as coordinator of Education Services, such rivalry was, in reality, nothing but an occasional forced controversy. Recalls Martinengo:

*Ricordo una qualche polemica un po’ tirata fuori ad arte... Perché poi se c’è la FILEF, che è di sinistra, allora ci deve essere per forza una controparte – se c’è Coppi ci deve essere Bartali – che sia di destra. In modo che, allora: la FILEF è di sinistra, il COASIT è di destra, è più vicino ai partiti conservatori... C’è stato qualche punzecchiamento ma niente di straordinario*.

Instead, although it did not aim to challenge *Il Globo* as a mass selling newspaper, FILEF’s *Nuovo Paese* disputed the conservative values expressed in *Il Globo* (Carli 1982: 27-31).

Italian and Australian conservative quarters were neither sympathetic to FILEF’s way of demanding reform, nor to the changes it brought about. They saw in FILEF’s willingness to jolt the political and cultural consciousness of Italian migrants in Australia the opportunity for the Italian-Australian Left, that is the PCI, to become an influential Italian pressure group in close contact with the Australian trade unions and the Labor Party. FILEF was “largely a PCI influenced organisation” (Carli 1982: 22), or as explained by Caputo an *organizzazione di massa allargata* (enlarged mass organisation)—that is, an organisation whose task i was to gather support among communists and non-communists. To convey the thought that FILEF was an organisation open to people of various ideological creeds and political backgrounds its president and secretary were usually not PCI members. In Rome, FILEF’s president was Carlo Levi, who although of left-wing background was not a PCI member; in Melbourne, FILEF’s secretary and president were both ALP members, Sgrò and Frattali respectively.
The ‘Italian communists move in’ incident of 1975 alongside other incidents, such as the re-allocation of FILEF’s Welfare Rights Officer grant in 1976 and deportation of Salemi in 1977 aimed to undermine FILEF’s credibility, mounting considerable pressure on its functionality.

The ‘Italian communists move in’ incident

In April 1975, Michael MacKellar, federal Liberal Opposition Spokesman on Immigration, uttered his loathing for FILEF-PCI connection during a meeting with George Papadopoulos and Spiro Moraitis of the AGWS, a migrant organisation similar to FILEF, which had established a contact with both major political parties (Lopez 2000: 378, 404). Moraitis noted down in his journal a comment of MacKellar on FILEF, which is interesting to read given that would unfold soon after: “[MacKellar] will attack FILEF because one of the FILEF social workers publicly stated (to an Italian audience) that FILEF was committed to the Communist Party!! Very wrong for a voluntary agency to attach itself to a political party” (ibid.: 378).

On 26 April 1975, The Age published a front-page article by Vincent Basile titled ‘Italian communists move in’. The article claimed that FILEF was sponsored by the PCI-affiliated Italian trade union CGIL and was allegedly attempting to gain an “all-out bid for political and social control of Melbourne’s 250,000-strong Italian community”\(^5\). They were sensational allegations, which were presented in a fashion and during a period that seems to have been well chosen by The Age editors. Besides being published on a Saturday, the article appeared in a period that, at an international level, coincided with the final phase of the Vietnam War: the North Vietnamese Communist Armed Forces were pushing the US-led allied troops South. Almost every day in April 1975, the headlines of The Age were dedicated, and it could not be otherwise, to war events in Vietnam\(^6\). Given the frantic succession of events, one can reasonably infer that at this point, the readers’ minds would have become conditioned to expect certain types of headlines, which would empathise the southward advance of the enemy troops.
A few days before the capitulation by the Allies in Vietnam (early May 1975), The Age published Basile’s article whose title bore a war-like tone that was reminiscent of the ongoing war in far-off Vietnam. By an association of ideas, it was hard to miss the connection between the communists in Vietnam and the Italian communists in Australia. The result was a transfer of the threat perception from the one to the other, with no apparent loss of intensity. Communists were perceived to be the dangerous in Australia as well as in Vietnam. It seems unlikely that the editors of The Age were unaware of the effects of the timing of the article.

The article contained other elements that suggested a disproportionate and twisted representation of FILEF. A large, central photo picturing Salemi in a defiant pose suggested an exaggerated feeling of menace (yet dryly contrasted by the plain modesty of the FILEF office in the background), while a cartoon at the bottom of the article ridiculed the presence of a “godfather from Moscow”.

Despite the headlines, the article was not particularly anti-communist. It acknowledged FILEF’s support for the 1974 Migrant Action Education Conference and 1975 establishment of the Ethnic Community Council as well as stressed that FILEF had “successfully tackled many migrant problems which had previously been largely ignored by other Italian organisations”. Yet, it put under a shady light other facts about FILEF, such as the findings of the FILEF-FEC social survey, the figure of Salemi, and FILEF’s relationship with the Australian Labor government, from which FILEF received a $10,000 grant under the Welfare Rights Officer Program.

Described with the attributes of a seasoned PCI official “heading two full-time workers and scores of volunteers at FILEF”, Salemi is presented as the linchpin within FILEF. His comments on the upsurge, sparked by FILEF, of political activity in the Italian-Australian community, encapsulated FILEF’s class-based view:

So far nothing has been done either by Australian or Italian organisations to widen migrant workers’ cultural and political knowledge that they can become active members of the community. In fact this lack of activity is a widespread and quiet kind of political terrorism. The conservative and capitalist classes have always made sure that migrants, through their spasmodic and desperate search for money and material welfare have been kept in isolation and prevented from full and active participation in the affairs of the country.
The Age’s allegations were embarrassing for FILEF. Sgrò was forced to make media appearances to contain the damage they caused (Lopez 2000: 403-4). In the weekend of the publication of Basile’s article, Sgrò printed and distributed 20,000 leaflets “to explain and restate FILEF’s function”\(^{10}\). He stressed in the strongest possible terms that FILEF was not wishing to take control of the “country”, but aimed “to inform people of their rights, and enable them to make up their own minds politically”\(^{11}\). Above all, he downplayed the figure of Salemi:

*As far as Mr Salemi is concerned: no, he is not the leader of the organisation here. The elected committee runs FILEF. [...] He is a communist, his job here is purely to carry out the work of the Committee. Every member of FILEF has the right to belong to whichever political party he or she chooses, without any interference. [...] No. The Italian Communists will not ‘move in’ in Australia. But members of FILEF will continue with the good work that they have started, and will urge migrants to participate, socially and politically, in life in Australia*\(^{12}\).

The Age’s allegations took by surprise Al Grassby, the Federal Government’s Advisor on Community Relations and a close friend of Sgrò. Interviewed by The Age, Grassby sensibly denied having been aware of any ‘red’ connections of FILEF: “[...] My only contacts have been with the secretary of FILEF (Mr G. Sgrò), who is a member of the Labor Party. My job is not to find out political affiliations of migrant organisations. [...] If this is an attempt to bring Italian politics here, it must certainly be regretted and deplored”\(^{13}\). Another prominent ALP politician, the Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden, stood by the government’s decision to allocation of the $10,000 grant to FILEF. For Hayden, FILEF had “demonstrated a capacity to reach and help a large proportion of Italian and other migrants”, and the grant “merely covered the salary and ancillary expenses of a welfare rights worker to assist migrants with welfare problems”\(^{14}\).

Judging by some letters sent to The Age, Basile’s article sparked vexation among FILEF’s supporters, which are worth recalling. A letter written by Bernie Taft of the CPA complained about the newspaper’s editorial policy and journalistic ethics, which had breached the “norms of fair objective reporting”\(^{15}\). Another letter, also to The Age but never
published, written by J.K. Foster, a retired migrant teacher who conducted English classes for adult migrants for seventeen years, commented:

_The report on FILEF (The Age 26/4) was quite an objective, factual report on the work of that organisation. Why did a false impression have to be created by crude, sensational headlines? [...] As a migrant myself of some fifty years standing, I may justifiably claim to have first hand knowledge of the problems that plague new settlers in this land. For the past twenty five years there has been no organisation to assist the migrant at the grass-roots level with the many problems that confront him from day to day in his new country. And now, from The Age report, this is precisely what FILEF is doing and appears to be doing very well. Why not let them get on with the job? Why raise the communist bogy? I thought we had left this sort of thinking behind us in the Sixties [...]_\(^{16}\).

Irritated by the claim that the FILEF-FEC survey was fallacious and carried out in order to please the PCI headquarters in Rome\(^ {17}\), Des Storer wrote to _The Age_ a letter, which was also not published:

[...] _In Saturday’s article, you also quoted a Mr Randazzo who claims that the survey which I helped FILEF carry out last year was ‘an attempt to show Communist party bosses in Italy that their money was being well spent’ and went on to say that the results on the survey were false. These assertions are completely wrong and false. The survey was largely organised by myself and I know no Italian politicians; the survey was financed by an independent Trust and I challenge Mr Randazzo to at least read the initial results of the survey before making such ridiculous assertions. The study was an independent survey of a random sample of 400 Italian families to scientifically determine their social situation and social perceptions. Its results have been initially analysed and unlike Mr Basile in his article states, asked no questions on housing. It did not attempt to compare the position of Italians to other groups in the northern suburbs and cannot, therefore, be seen as ‘diametrically opposed’ to the Abiuso study referred to which compared the situation of a number of different families, including 40 Italian families whose children attended one school in the area_\(^ {18}\).

Some felt pleased with _The Age_’s allegations and hoped for more action. The right-wing periodical _Il Corriere di Sette giorni_, published a letter of an Italian ex-serviceman who preferred to remain anonymous. This letter could mirror the feeling of a section of the Italian-
Signor Direttore,
perché non si dice chiaramente cosa vogliono questi comunisti italiani qui in Australia? Perché tanti stanno zitti, specie altri fogli in lingua italiana che stanno facendo la figura più marcia di questo mondo, muti di fronte alla tracotanza di questi elementi che un qualsiasi governo dovrebbe sentire il dovere di mettere alla porta? [...] Mai una sola volta prima di adesso ho sentito parlare di politica italiana, mai una discussione sul passato di Tizio o Caio; tutti emigrati per farsi o rifarsi una nuova esistenza qui in Australia, tesi ad allevare i nostri figli da perfetti democratici in un paese fino a poco tempo fa esempio di sano vivere democratico. Se li lasciamo fare come finiremo? [...] Se mi permette lo dico io [cosa vogliono questi comunisti]: vogliono toglierci la beata pace in cui viviamo da tanti anni. Vogliono mettere beghe tra noi, vogliono inquadrarci come lei ha fatto bene a scrivere. Sono invidiosi della nostra condizione di gente che ha raggiunto un livello confortabile – in tutti i sensi – di vita. Gelosi di chi si è arricchito, gelosi di chi ha comodità, figli educati, gode rispetto ed è divenuto qualcuno. Ecco cosa sono: quelli vecchi, qui da anni, soprattutto. [...] Se in Italia certe cose possono anche essere comprensibili e vi è sete di giustizia, questa è giustificata dalla disonestà e corruzione che dilaga dovunque. Ma qui in Australia sono rari i meriti e sforzi personali che non hanno avuto successo. Perché diventare comunisti causa un insuccesso per eventi sfortunati o altro che la democrazia nulla hanno a che vedere?¹⁹

In an interview with The Melbourne Times, Sgrò claimed that the Associazione Liberale Italiana (Italian Liberal Association) might be behind the action to discredit FILEF, an organisation established in Melbourne in early 1975 that grouped a “small but powerful band of Italian businessmen”²⁰. Sgrò also claimed that Basile’s article could also be the result of a personal vendetta of Nino Randazzo: “Back in 1959, Randazzo stood for the DLP in Fitzroy and I played a part in discrediting him for attacking the Liberal government, insinuating that his party identification was less than stable. I don’t think he’s ever forgiven us”²¹.
Local anti-communist hysteria

Eventually, *The Age*’s allegations stirred up anti-communist hysteria. Cathy Angelone recalled that immediately after the publication of the Basile article, one Mrs McCollum organised at least two anti-communist marches along the streets of Coburg. But the most serious incident occurred on the night of 13 May 1975. An arsonist attempted to burn down the FILEF office in Coburg, partially damaging the editorial office of *Nuovo Paese*. For Sgrò, the arson could well have been the direct result of *The Age*’s allegations, carried out by people who thought that FILEF was trying to introduce communism into the local Italian-Australian community. For *Nuovo Paese*, it was a “provocazione deliberata [della] campagna di odio maccartistico scatenata dalla stampa padronale australiana e italiana” (instigation fruit of the deliberate hatred campaign McCarthy-era style triggered off by the Italian and Australian industrialist press), a claim that was in turn taken up by the left-wing press in Italy. The campaign against FILEF provoked “a strong sense of indignation and a vast movement of support”: many political and community organisations in Australia and in Italy showed their support and contributed financially to the rebuilding of FILEF’s damaged office.

Recollections of the 1975 incidents

Several of those interviewed for this research had vivid memories of the ‘Italian communist move in’ and arson incidents. Their recollections seem to uncap mixed emotions event today. Asked what she remembers about these events, Anne Sgrò answered:

*If I remember the article ‘Italian communists move in’? I can still see the headlines. That weekend we were renovating this tumbled-down tiny house that we still go to in Tallangatta in the North-East of Victoria. Giovanni used to go up for weekends with the van from work because he and his brother were painting. […] I had to ring a neighbour and say: “Look, go down and say Giovanni he should either come home or go in to town and buy a copy of The Age and have a look”. That was just astonishing. I think that Australians to a certain extent had got over the fear of the Yellow Peril, which was the embodiment of the Red Chinese, but I suppose now there isn’t that… but even then, you*
know, communism was something that was beyond the pale. People didn’t really admit to being communist activists on the whole. There was a quite strong anti-communist feeling.

For Stefano de Pieri, the ‘Italian communists move in’ incident was quite frightening for FILEF. Implicitly, it compromised Salemi’s residence status, given that he held at the time a temporary entry permit:

Se mi ricordo dell’articolo di Vince Basile? Ciò, la prima pagina del The Age... Allora non c’erano mica tanti giornali e altri mezzi d’informazione. C’era il Sun alla mattina e l’Herald il pomeriggio. Il sabato mattina ti vedi questo italiano così, in una brutta posa su questo cancelletto, con ‘Italian communists move in’. Fece tremare un po’, era un po’ da paura eh... Mi ricordo quella mattina io stavo ancora con Bill e Lorne. Mi hanno chiamato e mi dicono: “Come and have a look at this”. Mi vestii, presi il treno e andai subito su a Munro Street. Beh, li c’era tutto un subbuglio di gente che andava e che veniva, che porconava qua e là. E li sicuramente l’articolo non nacque a caso, li sicuramente qualcuno nell’ambiente italiano, magari DLP, chissà disse a Vince: “Va a fare un lavoro su di quello”, sicuramente. Vince vanta sempre con me, dice: “Vi diedi io più pubblicità che voi mai ve l’eravate immaginati, vi ho fatti famosi”, però mettendo Salemi nell’occhio del ciclone, che aveva appunto un permesso di residenza a termine. Secondo me era un set up. Forse l’articolo non era nemmeno fatto per quello scopo, forse era fatto per una pagina interna. E qualche editore ha detto: “Che scoop! Questo ci dà front page, leading story”.

For Cathy Angelone the ‘Italian communists move in’ incident, despite its damaging headlines, projected FILEF to national spotlight, enjoying mainstream media coverage and community support:

[…] Quel discorso dell’articolo e dell’incendio in realtà non è che ha danneggiato la FILEF, anzi, perché se n’è parlato così tanto della FILEF alla televisione, alla radio, perché tutti erano curiosi: ‘Che cos’è questa ‘Italian communists move in’? Che cos’è questo fenomeno che sta nascendo? Che è? Sono arrivati i comunisti? Non sapevamo niente’. Quindi tutti a chiedere, ‘venite a spiegare’, cercando sempre di mettere in difficoltà.

Nonetheless, Salemi as well as FILEF were now, in de Pieri’s words, “nell’occhio del ciclone” (in the eye of the storm). With the change of government at federal level in late
1975, they suffered significant setbacks: the former was deported, the latter had its government funding cut.

The re-allocation of FILEF’s Welfare Rights Officer grant

On 17 August 1976, the Department for Social Security informed FILEF, one of the five recipient organisations of the Welfare Rights Program (see Chapter 4) that funding to the Italian organisation would be cut as of 1 January 1977 and re-allocated to a lone parent group, Parents Without Partners (Sandford 1977: 112). This was an unexpected about-turn by the department. One month earlier, FILEF had received a one-time grant of $5,000 from the Minister for Social Security, Sen. Margaret Guilfoyle, who personally visited the FILEF office. The department justified its action on two bases, that there were two Italian-run organisations, FILEF and COASIT, that had received funding under the program, and that FILEF was on the same geographical proximity to a similar organisation, the NOW Centre (Sandford 1977: 113 and 119).

Welfare rights organisations, including the NOW Centre, as well as community groups, publicly expressed concern about the re-allocation of FILEF’s grant, and found the reasons given by the department contradictory and inconsistent (Sandford 1977: 6). During a parliamentary debate, Sen. Guilfoyle denied that there was any link between the ongoing Salemi case and the allegations published by The Age, and her decision to terminate FILEF’s funding (Sandford 1977: 118). The termination represented a serious financial backlash for FILEF, which had relied on government funding to develop and further its action.

Conclusion

The allegations about FILEF’s association with the PCI were a shock to many FILEF members and supporters. The ‘attack’ on FILEF served to rally support from individuals and organisations that had thus far not affiliated themselves with FILEF in a public manner. While it brought to the fore certain tensions within FILEF, such as that between
Sgrò and Salemi, it simultaneously strengthened the coherence of the organisation at a more grass-roots level, invoking expressions of indignation with the politicising of FILEF and of appreciation for the real contributions of FILEF to the life of Italian migrants. Different interviewees recollected different aspects of the struggles of FILEF in the wake of the allegations. While many of the recollections betray great resentment about the fact that FILEF had been drawn into the ‘communist issue’ and had been forced to invest in a defensive stance at the expense of some of its more constructive activities, they also speak of side effects experienced as positive, such as the negative light cast on Salemi and the increased publicity surrounding FILEF.

Notes to Chapter 7

1 This legislation was aimed at reforming Italian consulates around the world by establishing consultative committees for the administration of migrant affairs and funding. In Australia, the implementation of this legislation was delayed for more than a decade. See R. Licata, ‘Comitato unitario e comitati consolari’, paper no. 2 delivered at the First FILEF National Congress, October 1977, FMA.
2 ‘FILEF’s 10 years of activities’, Nuovo Paese, [1982].
3 Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
4 Ibid.
6 See, for instance, ‘Panic spreads as communist offensive pushes deeper into South, another Viet city in peril’, The Age, 1 April 1975; ‘Army rules in Phnom Penh’, The Age, 14 April 1975; ‘Australia gets second warning: fly out while there’s a chance, Saigon awaits the big push’, The Age, 19 April 1975.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 V. Basile, ‘Communists and others in group’, The Age, 28 April 1975.
11 G. Sgrò, ‘Some answers to The Age article 26-4-1975, Italian communists move in’, leaflet mimeographed, undated, courtesy of the Joe Caputo Private Collection.
12 Ibid.
14 ‘Hayden backs FILEF’s aid’, The Age, [April/May 1975].
17 On the findings of the FILEF-FEC social survey, Basile’s article claimed that were false and diametrically opposite to a survey carried out at approximately the same time by Joe Abiuso, an Italian-born teacher at La Trobe University. Quoting Il Globo editor Nino Randazzo, the survey
“was an attempt ‘to show the communist party bosses in Italy that their money is being well spent’”.

21 Ibid.
22 Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author). See also ‘Numerosi attestati di simpatia per le nostre organizzazioni della FILEF’, Nuovo Paese, 17 May 1975.
23 ‘Fire was lit deliberately, says FILEF secretary’, The Age, 15 May 1975.
27 Anne Sgrò, interview with author, 22 April 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
28 Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
29 Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
Chapter 8
THE SALEMI CASE

In 1976, Salemi was at the centre of a contentious dispute over his amnesty application. Claiming that he was in the position to fully satisfy the criteria set by the amnesty, Salemi took the matter to the High Court with the full backing of FILEF, like-minded organisations, and the Australian Left. Salemi’s controversial court action lasted more than eighteen months and resulted in a passionate political campaign. For the government and the conservatives Salemi was and remained an illegal immigrant who ought to be deported, for the Left he was unfairly persecuted for his political background and he had the right to defend himself before the courts. The Salemi case would put Australia’s fair-go policy to the test, when in May 1977 an appeal to the full bench of the High Court split the six judges on the matter.

The controversial rejection of Salemi’s amnesty application

In eager yet forthright terms, Liberal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Michael MacKellar presented the 1976 amnesty for prohibited immigrants, who had overstayed their visitors’ visas, in Migration Action (the journal of the EMC):

We believed that a lot of people who are living here in fear of deportation should be given an opportunity to remain in Australia. Of course, this amnesty arrangement will not apply to criminals and other undesirable people, but let me give you my assurance that every application for residence will be looked at with great sympathy (MacKellar 1976: 4).

The aim of this statement, as well as of MacKellar’s four news releases on the amnesty, was to give illegal immigrants the confidence to come forward and legalise their residence status. Illegal immigrants supposedly constituted 0.3% (or 35,000 to 45,000) of the overall
Australian population in 1975 (Storer 1977: 2). The amnesty came about for interconnected social, political, and economic reasons (ibid.: 3). It mirrored the change of attitude among Australian politicians towards non-English-speaking immigrants, who had lobbied hard through welfare agencies and church bodies for the readjustment of the status of illegal immigrants. It had been the fulfilment of a specific electoral promise made by the Liberals during the December 1975 election campaign, and it had the support of many Australian industrialists who were concerned about the ongoing shortage of manpower in the mining and manufacturing industries.

However the amnesty was more of a failure than a success, as MacKellar later recognised (Bertelli 1979: 10). Only 8,614 permanent-residence-seekers, out of the prospective 35-40,000, sought to make their stay in Australia legal. Ethnic and community organisations complained about the failure of the amnesty and accused the Immigration Department of being un-cooperative, remarking that the period for the amnesty (from January 26 to April 30, 1976) was too short, and that the announcements informing the amnesty were delivered only through English speaking media (Storer 1977: 3-4).

At the time of the amnesty, Salemi had been a prohibited immigrant since July 1975. He applied under the amnesty but his application was one of the very few rejected by the Immigration Department, and supposedly the only rejection for a person without a criminal record. Although Salemi satisfied all three amnesty criteria (sound character, no criminal record and good health), the Immigration Department alleged it was not genuine. The Minister argued that Salemi, being a temporary resident who overstayed his visa, did not fall within the category of overstayed visitors to whom the amnesty offer was being made. In addition, he pointed out that when submitting his application, Salemi had stated to the interviewing officer that he “[…] was not really seeking permanent residence but only wished to extend his temporary stay”. The department thus regarded Salemi’s application as not *bona fide* and felt that his exclusion from the amnesty was warranted. Under section 18 of the Immigration Act (1958), Salemi was and remained a prohibited immigrant, and hence liable to be arrested, imprisoned, and deported at any time by Ministerial fiat.

Salemi took the matter to the High Court and claimed that he was in the position to fully satisfy the amnesty criteria as stated by the news releases, particularly those of January 27 and April 9, 1976, which extended the offer to illegal immigrants other than overstayed
visitors. Given that he belonged to the class of persons to whom the amnesty offer was made, he argued that he was not a prohibited immigrant to whom the Minister’s deportation powers could be applied. The Minister’s four news releases conveyed a determination to grant entry permits of indefinite duration and had created in him a legitimate expectation of being granted a residence permit.

Shadow Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Ted Innes followed the developments of the ‘Salemi case’ from the very beginning to the very end. To Innes, the Italian-born FILEF activist was “a skilled and valuable community worker” whose work for FILEF had been “absolutely essential”; he was unfairly refused amnesty “on extremely technical grounds” and without consideration of his merits. Innes’ stance epitomised the solidarity displayed by those sections of the Australian Left that had been close to FILEF, but contrary to what one might have expected, the Immigration Department under the Whitlam government did not back Salemi’s repeated requests to stay in Australia.

**Salemi’s earlier visa applications**

Salemi’s troubled relationship with the Immigration Department started in fact well before April 1976. The department first demonstrated concern with Salemi’s residence status when requests to extend his stay were made on his behalf in mid-1974. Archival data has revealed a rather detectable ‘unwillingness’ of Labor Immigration Ministers Clyde Cameron and James McClelland to extend Salemi’s residence permit after he returned to Australia with a six-month visitor’s visa in March 1974—following his participation in October 1973 in the first Migrant Workers’ Conferences in Melbourne and Sydney (see Chapter 3). The epistolary exchange of the Immigration Department with FILEF and influential left wing groups, who were calling for Salemi to be allowed to stay in the country for longer, shows reluctance by the department to settle Salemi’s visa issue.

As early as June 1974, the Immigration Department received requests to turn Salemi’s short stay in Australia into a long-term one. A letter to the Immigration Department by Gordon Bryant, Labor Minister for the ACT and a close friend of Giovanni Sgrò, is an example. Bryant inquired about the possibilities for a new visa for Salemi, preferably valid
for twelve to twenty-four months, “[…] to enable him to carry on the intense activity in support of FILEF”9. In spite of Bryant’s intervention, Salemi’s visa was not renewed. Bound for Rome to visit family for a month, Salemi left Australia in early August 1974. There, he applied for a new visa at the Australian migration office in Rome, confident that he would be able to return swiftly to Melbourne10.

Australian Immigration officials in Rome told him that a new visa would not be available for two or three months. Anxious to come back, Salemi hoped to have his return to Australia “expedited” with a new intervention by Bryant11. Foreseeing a purposeful delay of the processing of his visa application by the Australian authorities, Salemi waited no longer and flew to New Zealand in the hope of reaching Australia. Salemi’s “trip” to New Zealand proved to be a clever move. He applied for a visitor’s visa for the purpose of sight-seeing at the Australian migration office in Auckland. Canberra negotiated Salemi’s return with FILEF and eventually agreed to grant him a nine-month temporary entry, but instead received a three-month visit permit was issued in New Zealand. Salemi returned to Australia on 30 October 197412. He received his temporary entry permit “with authority to engage in specified employment” in February 197513.

Salemi’s visa status remained temporary. As the new temporary visa’s deadline approached (30 July 1975), Salemi once more faced the dilemma prolonging his stay in the country. FILEF used its meaningful contacts to try and obtain a further extension of Salemi’s visa. A letter to Ted Innes by E. Forbes, assistant secretary of the Victorian branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (FMWU), is another example of the exploration of new means of keeping Salemi in Australia. Forbes invited Innes to probe the possibilities of Salemi’s acceptability as a “migrant” without the necessity of having to return to Italy first, and guaranteed that he would have Salemi take up work more closely associated with the Unions14. Whether this and similar requests achieved any result is unknown; but no new visa was granted to Salemi. A letter from Sgrò to Peter Wilenski, General Director of the Immigration Department, some three weeks before Salemi’s entry permit expired, vented all his frustration:

_We have met with many obstacles from the Immigration Department. I have written many letters explaining the situation, and have filled the required forms two or three times, with no result. We_
Wilenski’s reply to Sgrò is indicative of how the new requests for an extension of Salemi’s stay in Australia were dealt with: no trace of any of Salemi’s applications for an extension of his permit was found in the Department’s records, although both offices in Canberra and Melbourne indicated “a certain amount of correspondence” on Salemi’s previous application. Salemi applied unsuccessfully for a two-year temporary entry permit immediately before his visa ran out, and thereafter became a prohibited immigrant. No action was taken by the Immigration Department against him, until April 1976.

Challenging the unchallengeable: from High Court to Federal Ombudsman

Perhaps more controversially than ever before, the legal and political case that followed the rejection of Salemi’s 1976 amnesty application put Australia’s fair-go policy to the test. This is best reflected in the culmination of the case: the evenly divided decision of the full bench of the High Court of May 1977. The High Court decision ruled by statutory majority that the principles of natural justice, or procedural fairness, were not applicable to section 18 of the Immigration Act (1958), which empowered the Immigration Minister to deport any prohibited non-citizen at his or her absolute discretion. By employing the judicial system to challenge the unlimited deportation powers bestowed upon the Minister, Salemi showed the inadequacy of the machinery for the review of deportation orders in place at the time. The Immigration Act was constructed in such a way that, in many cases, a deportation order was a “mere formality”, difficult to dispute. By appealing to the federal ombudsman, Salemi exhausted almost all the legal avenues at his disposal (the possibility of taking the matter to the Privy Council was considered but not pursued).

When MacKellar announced an amnesty for illegal immigrants in late January 1976, Salemi did not apply for it immediately. In an oral testimony, Salemi explained that, initially, he had paid very little attention to the announcement; having experienced two previous deportations, he admitted that he had cultivated an innate ‘aversion’ to visas and permits.


Yet, when the Immigration Department ordered him to leave the country, and with Innes’ encouragement, he sought amnesty\textsuperscript{21}. With the assistance of Sgrò, Salemi lodged an amnesty application at the Melbourne office of the Immigration Department on 1 April 1976. Salemi recalled that the immigration officials seemed ‘uneasy’ as soon as he declared his identity. Following a lengthy wait, he was told that his application would most likely be rejected\textsuperscript{22}. MacKellar recalled his department’s version of the event in Parliament in September 1977:

\textit{[…] Mr Salemi did submit an application. He told the officer who interviewed him that that he did so at the instigation of the honourable member (Innes) who raised this matter in the present debate. He admitted to the interviewing officer that he did not want to remain permanently in Australia […] The interviewing officer concerned verified by questions that Mr Salemi was not within the eligible categories and referred his application with her report to Canberra for consideration\textsuperscript{23}.}

In late May 1976, MacKellar informed Salemi that his amnesty application was unsuccessful and invited him to make arrangements to depart from Australia no later than June 30. As pressure began to mount for a review of the Minister’s decision, the ‘invitation’ was extended until August 14\textsuperscript{24}. Salemi took out a High Court writ, seeking an injunction to restrain the Immigration Minister to issue a deportation order for him. The Australian Left mobilised its best Labor lawyers to represent Salemi: Peter Redlich and Clyde Holding, president of the Victorian ALP and Labor leader in the Victorian Parliament respectively.

Neither of Salemi’s arguments, as mentioned above, were successful at the first hearing of the High Court on 26 August 1976. Sir Harry Gibbs J, sitting in chambers in Sydney, struck out Salemi’s writ because he had failed to establish a cause of action. Nevertheless, he pointed out that if Salemi fell within the description of the persons for whom the amnesty was meant, it would be “a grave breach of faith to fail to grant him the amnesty”\textsuperscript{25}. Salemi lodged an appeal to the full bench of the High Court, arguing that the Immigration Minister had to apply the Immigration Act in accordance with the principles of natural justice - that is, to grant Salemi the right to a hearing and an opportunity to challenge the deportation order. On 21 October 1976, the full High Court bench (Mason, Jacobs, Murphy, and Aickin JJ)
granted Salemi’s appeal, allowing him to stay in Australia until further proceedings before the court were finalised.

Seven months elapsed before the High Court passed judgment on the Salemi case. On 11 May 1977, at the full hearing, the six judges of the High Court (Barwick CJ, Gibbs, Aickin, Stephen, Jacobs, and Murphy JJ) were divided equally. The judgment was in favour of MacKellar, on the casting vote of Barwick CJ. Barwick CJ, Gibbs and Aickin JJ argued that section 18 of the Immigration Act did not require the Immigration Minister to abide by the principles of natural justice. The Minister was not bound to give Salemi “an opportunity to be heard on such questions as whether he was of good character and normal health and was otherwise within the class described in the news releases, and whether or not he ought to be deported.”

Stephen, Jacob, and Murphy JJ dissented. Stephen J rejected the first two of Salemi’s claims, namely that Salemi was not a prohibited immigrant and was allowed to stay indefinitely in Australia, but pointed out that the Minister was bound to afford Salemi a hearing or provide a reason as to why he should be deported, even though the Immigration Act did not require any form of independent inquiry, nor any hearing before the Minister himself. Salemi was entitled to know precisely and in detail the nature of the ground upon which the Minister considered his exclusion from the amnesty, and therefore his deportation. Jacobs J insisted that there had to be another reason for Salemi’s exclusion from the amnesty and that Salemi was entitled to know that reason:

*If the reason were national security, he could hardly expect to know more; but if the reason were personal to him, he could expect to know more so that he would have the opportunity to rebut them. If it is considered that he does not fall within the offer of amnesty he should be told the how and why, so that he can present arguments to the contrary. If there is an intention to depart from the terms of the offer of amnesty he should be told, so that he could present arguments against such a departure.*

For Murphy J, the Immigration Act did not enable the Minister to exercise his discretion to order deportation “in bad faith, without regard to the interests of the person affected, and in a manner, which denies natural justice. The power to deport, like other powers, is to be exercised bona fide”. Barwick CJ insisted that Salemi, as a prohibited immigrant, had no
right to remain in Australia. Nor did the amnesty’s stipulations alter his position, as they constituted a mere statement of policy without legal bound, although they could incite human expectations (as distinct from lawful expectations).

Although narrowly defeated, Salemi could claim a moral victory. Three of the six judges had accepted his argument, while trade unions, ethnic and community organisations, and civil liberty groups continued to express hearty solidarity with him. Even so, Salemi’s future in Australia looked more uncertain than ever. The final word on his troubled stay rested with the Immigration Minister MacKellar, who stood firm and gave Salemi until June 8 to supply further reasons as to why he should not be deported. Salemi’s legal advisers Redlich and Holding, who initially abandoned the idea of bringing the case before the Privy Council, appealed to the federal ombudsman; the argument was that false and misleading information supplied to Ministry officers had led the Minister into error when examining Salemi’s case.

Professor J.E. Richardson, first federal ombudsman, represented Salemi’s last hope. Salemi’s best-case scenario would have been for Richardson to find that the Immigration Department had misled MacKellar and for MacKellar to agree it had. But this was, of course, very unlikely to happen. A month and a half later Richardson concluded his investigation. Richardson’s report was critical of the Immigration Department’s handling of the Salemi case and of the way Salemi was treated. He found that Immigration Department officials failed to advise the Minister properly but supplied no false information to him. MacKellar acknowledged the Richardson report but still decided that Salemi should leave the country. The Minister informed Salemi that he saw no reason to depart from his earlier decision and now required him to leave Australia by July 8. Salemi failed to comply with MacKellar’s request and a deportation order was issue on 2 September 1977. Salemi went into hiding, with the full support of FILEF, the trade unions and CURA activists.

A last, desperate appeal to override MacKellar’s decision was made by Holding and Redlich directly to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and his “sense of moral values.” The Italian government also intervened, asking the Australian government to withdraw the deportation order “in the interests of friendship between the two countries.” On 19 October 1977, the Australian federal police arrested Salemi and whisked him out of the country, ending what a dejected Redlich described to The Sydney Morning Herald as a case in which a government has acted stupidly and vindictively in respect of one individual.
In support of Salemi: the politicising of the case by the Left

Predictably, given Salemi’s key role in the organisation, FILEF placed itself at the forefront of a campaign to keep Salemi in Australia, and was joined in this by organisations and personalities of the Australian Left. FILEF aimed to raise public awareness of the case in an attempt to put as much pressure as possible on the Ministry of Immigration, and hence the Fraser government. Several of FILEF’s press releases, including a detailed background briefing on the organisation itself, stressed the importance of the case and the vital role of a person of Salemi’s stature within the organisation and within the Italian-Australian community. As the first appeal to the High Court was launched, FILEF set up a defence fund to finance and carry out all aspects of the legal case, and started to circulate petitions, especially among the working class. A set of bilingual information bulletins, produced between August and November 1976, summed up the central issues of the campaign.

FILEF portrayed its struggle as one in which the whole working class ought to be involved – a struggle against a conservative government, whose strategy was to exhaust FILEF’s activism by deporting its mastermind and by ceasing funding under the Welfare Rights Officer Program. FILEF information bulletin No. 5, of 7 October 1976, stated that:

*Attacks against FILEF are attacks against the working class: there is still no word from the two Liberal Government’s interested Departments on their discrimination attacks again FILEF. The Minister for Social Security, Senator Guilfoyle, has given no plausible reason for the decision to reallocate FILEF’s Welfare Rights Grant. Obviously there is no reason other than political discrimination […] Why then has the Government changed its mind? WE MUST DEFEND OUR RIGHTS! At the moment there is a real and pressing need to continue the campaign ensuring that the discrimination acts against FILEF are not forgotten, so that the struggle to keep Mr Salemi in Australia and to keep FILEF operating will continue.*

FILEF was keen to involve as many organisations and people as possible in the campaign. It informed unions, ethnic organisations and community bodies that its fight for justice “[…] must not be regarded as affecting Mr Salemi or FILEF only, but as a campaign in which the future of the migrant workers is in jeopardy – their right to having their own organisations, and skilled people to work in them, their right to organise themselves is what is in
jeopardy”. The Committee Against Political Deportations (CAPD) saw the case as a battle of principles, in which “the principles of democracy and natural justice were virtually ignored”.

Support for Salemi soon reached the highest political levels of the Australian Left, with the backing of the ACTU President, Bob Hawke, and the Opposition Leader, Gough Whitlam. More organisations followed, sending letters and telegrams of protest to the Minister and requests for information to FILEF. As support was mounting for Salemi to be allowed to stay in Australia, FILEF convened a public meeting at the Albion Hall in Brunswick on Sunday 15 August 1976. Some three hundred workers were present, joined by various political personalities: Bryant, Walter Lippmann, President of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Bill Brown, Labor senator, John Bennett, secretary of the Civil Liberties Council, all publicly affirming their support for Salemi’s cause.

Activists of the vanguard of the migrant welfare sector such as Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer of the CURA, and Alan Matheson of the EMC embraced the FILEF campaign. They endorsed the campaign not only by inviting organisations to join FILEF’s struggle and documenting the case (Faulkner 1977; Storer 1977), but also by helping Salemi hide from the police. Oral testimonies gathered for this research project recall that Faulkner, Storer, and Matheson, together with Rev. Richard Wootton and former Methodist minister Brian Howe (chairman and director of the CURA respectively), kept Salemi in hiding for some time, allegedly at Howe’s house in Fitzroy. Other churchmen, like Rev. Peter Hollingworth of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Hamish Christie-Johnson of the Victorian Council of Churches, joined Bob Hawke, president of the ACTU, and expressed their dissent from MacKellar’s stance on the Salemi case in a sharp, joint press release:

*The group called on the Minister to grant amnesty to Ignazio Salemi who according to the High Court is eligible for amnesty and complies with the criteria laid down by the Minister. The group pointed out, that, to date, Mr MacKellar has failed to provide a genuine reason for his refusal of the amnesty. In the absence of a clear statement from the Minister it must be assumed that the sole reason is Mr Salemi’s political opinions and as such would represent a form of discrimination characteristic of the early fifties.*
Tom Roper, Jim Simmonds, and Jack Ginifer also embraced the Salemi cause. Their commitment took the form of political support for the campaign by realising press statements and posing questions in state and federal parliaments. A passionate grievance debate took place in the federal parliament a few days after MacKellar signed the deportation order, marking perhaps the highest point of the Australian Left’s public commitment to Salemi. Ted Innes, Anthony Whitlam, Lionel Bowen, and Gordon Bryant invited the Immigration Minister to withdraw the deportation order and to put an end to the “persecution” of Salemi. It was Bryant, having fought passionately for fifteen years for Sgrò’s obtainment of Australian citizenship (see Sgrò 2002: 51), who addressed the Minister in the most pressing way:

...I ask the minister: For heaven’s sake, just this once exercise common sense. It is not a question of clemency or humanitarianism; it is a question of sensitivity to the needs of the community. This matter has been running for years. I have handled hundreds of cases in my time as a member of Parliament on behalf of people who have been excluded from this country, refused residency or refused naturalisation on these grounds, and eventually I have won a lot of those cases. It is time to show common sense and do a service for the community.

Alongside Labor politicians, trade union leaders such as the late John Halfpenny labelled the Salemi case as representing a “ruthless act of discrimination” by the government. The unions, familiar with the persecution of people who were active in the trade union movement or in endeavours to better the lot of their fellows, decided not to leave the case “unchallenged”. From the onset, Bob Hawke and other trade union officials stated that the unions would be very loath to take part in any activity aimed at deporting Salemi. In August 1976, Hawke publicly threatened to undertake pullouts and bans to prevent Salemi leaving the country: transport workers and other unionists “[...] would stop the plane or ship trying to take him out”. A year later, Hawke again pledged the trade unions’ support for Salemi, but remained vague about how far unions would go to prevent Mr Salemi’s deportation.

Salemi’s arrest and sudden deportation took everyone (the press included) by surprise and did not spark the ‘union moves’ predicted by Hawke. Strong protests, such as those by the Victorian branch of the Vehicle Builders’ Employees’ Federation (VBEF) and State Shadow Labor and Industry Minister Jim Simmonds, channelled the dissent against the government’s
stance. The VBEF articulated that the deportation represented “[…] not merely the final act in a long travesty of justice, but also part of an orchestrated attack on all organisations fighting for migrant rights in Australia” 58. Salemi’s deportation constituted “another step in the overall strategy of the Federal Government aimed at destroying the Australian working class” 59. Likewise, Simmonds stated that the deportation provided further evidence that the federal Government “[…] was moving, step by step, closer to establishing something akin to a dictatorship […] a step towards the tactic of the knock on the door in the middle of the night”60.

**The Salemi case in the literature**

Over the years, the Salemi case has attracted the attention of scholars and researchers, mainly of migrant and multicultural studies, who have offered political readings of the court case. This is the case of Faulkner (1977: 13), Storer (1977: 8), Sornarajah (1985: 521), Cresciani et al. (1985: 103), Lever-Tracy & Quinlan (1988: 155-56, 161), Castles et al. (1987: 125), Jones (1995: 11), Langfield (1996: 61), and Davidson (1997b: 84; 1997a: 163-64). By and large, they support the thesis that the true reason behind MacKellar’s refusal to allow Salemi to benefit from the amnesty was Salemi’s communist background and his activism within FILEF.

Cresciani et al. (1985: 103) also linked the case to the 1975 arson attempt on the FILEF office, and consider the case and the arson attempt the price that Italian-Australian conservatives made FILEF pay for jolting the political conscience of Italian immigrants. Jakubowicz et al. (1984: 81) argued instead that the case was the denouement of the conflict between FILEF and the COASIT. Castles et al. (1987: 128) took the Salemi case as example the vulnerability of the civil rights of permanent and temporary residents in Australia at the time, especially of those involved in political or trade union activities. For Davidson (1997b: 82-84), the case was an example of how the Australian government, driven by the anti-Communist feelings inherited from earlier conservative governments, had a tendency to silence left wing, vanguard voices among the migrants.
The Salemi case has also been subject to some interesting interpretations over the years among legal scholars. The 1977 High Court decision sparked a debate among them on the meaning of the principles of natural justice and legitimate expectations in relation to the deportation of illegal immigrants (see for example Johnson 1985; Somarajah 1985; Mackie 1985; Flick 1978). The High Court ruling achieved in the Salemi case was of great significance to migrant administrative law for quite some time, but was based on a narrow view of what was entailed for the plaintiff by the natural justice. At that time, people were permitted natural justice only if their rights were affected by a decision. Salemi’s interests were affected, but not his legal rights. This view of the natural justice requirements was open to question, even in the late 1970s.

There is little doubt that the Salemi case would be decided differently today (McMillan 2000: 8), where an appeal system (i.e. the Immigration Review Tribunal) is in place for those awaiting deportation. By the mid 1980s, this view of what was entailed by the natural justice requirements in the Salemi case, as well as in the Queen v MacKellar: ex parte Ratu case, was effectively overruled by the Kioa v West case. In the latter case, the High Court departed from the views expressed in the Salemi and Ratu cases and stated that there was an obligation, in principle, to observe natural justice in relation to decisions on immigrant status. The Salemi and Ratu cases have since been quoted in the literature so as to underscore the 1985 ruling (Clothier 1986; O’Connor 1998; Jones 1995; Paterson 1992; Crock 1989; Wong 1987; Allars 1987).

Past interpretations have canvassed important aspects of the event, but have failed to take account of others, such as the decisive role played by the conservative press before and throughout the court case in its depiction of Salemi as a dangerous ‘red’. People from anti-Salemi and anti-FILEF quarters sought to instil in the broader public a sense of the danger he supposedly represented, in the process misrepresenting facts concerning FILEF as well as Salemi and his case. For the editor of Il Globo Nino Randazzo, FILEF wished to incite a scandal, a “riot”, using the pretext of the court case, while Salemi was nothing but a qualified and highly experienced “political agent”, who did not have “any right to the amnesty, reserved for (genuine) illegal immigrants”. According to Anthony Cheesewright and Richard Wills of The Herald, Salemi even had links with the Italian underworld, a view that was later quoted by Il Globo. A letter sent to MacKellar after Salemi’s deportation by one
Angelo Sergi from “Turkey” seems to betray the absorption of some of the anti-Salemi propaganda, referring to the “dago bastard” Salemi as “a well known communist and one of the heads of the dreaded mafia”\(^6\).  

**Conclusion**  

I argue that what was later to become known as the ‘Salemi case’ started as early as 1974, when Ignazio Salemi applied for twelve-month extension of his first short-term entry permit, at a time when the Whitlam Labor government was still in office. Salemi himself was little known to the public. In general, the starting point of the case has been portrayed as being the refusal of his 1976 amnesty. However, by that time the Italian-born FILEF organiser was well known to public from his role in the ‘Italian communists move in’ incident in which he was depicted as a cunning communist agitator. This exposure no doubt influenced the course and outcome of the unfolding case in the following years: Salemi’s amnesty application was refused and led to a controversial court case that lasted almost two years. In the process, virtually all legal avenues were exhausted, and the case resulted in a passionate political campaign in which Labor, migrant, and church left-wing quarters fought a ‘battle of principles’. The final appeal to the full bench of the High Court of May 1977 split the six judges on the matter and indicated how controversial the case really was. Salemi eventually did not succeed in his pursuit to restrain the Government from deporting him. The far reaching consequences for FILEF following his expulsion in 1977 will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Notes to Chapter 8**

1  Excerpts from this chapter were published in Battiston (2005).
2  MacKellar circulated four news releases on the subject of the amnesty, on 26 and 27 January 1976, 5 February 1976, and 9 April 1976.
3  According to the data supplied in June 1976 by the Immigration Department (see Storer 1977: 6), 5,574 applications had been approved, 3,036 were under consideration, and four were refused.
4  On the lack of advertising about the amnesty in the ethnic media, see also ‘Il fatto di 50mila clandestini – Nessuna amnistia’, *La Fiamma*, 23 May 1977.


7 ‘Mr MacKellar again urged overstayed visitors and others living illegally in Australia who were covered by the terms of the amnesty offer to come forward … Amnesty could be sought by all visitors who were overstayed at 31 December 1975. Cases involving persons other than overstayed visitors would be considered on individual merits. Those who met normal standards of health and good character would be granted resident status” (M. MacKellar, ‘News release’, 27 January 1976). “The amnesty basically applied to people who had overstayed visitors’ visas or entry permits” (M. MacKellar, ‘News release’, 9 April 1976).


11 Ibid.


13 Grievance debate, House of Representatives, 8 August 1977, Hansard: 899.


17 The Judiciary Act of 1903, s. 23. Sub-s. (2)(b) states that, when the court is evenly divided, the judgement of the Chief Justice shall prevail (Wong 1987: 397, footnote 10).


19 In the 1960s Salemi was correspondent for the PCI organ L’Unità and a radio journalist for PCI-sponsored Italian-language radio programs in Budapest and Prague. He spent four years in Budapest, from ca. 1960 to 1964, before returning to Italy in 1964 or 1965. In 1966 he set out for Prague. In 1969, during the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he was directly involved in an episode that led to his second deportation, when he tried to save an anti-occupation demonstrator from an army squad by throwing a flowerpot at the army squad.

20 Ignazio Salemi, interview with author, 3 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

21 On 29 March 1976, the Immigration Department notified Salemi that there was no real justification for him to remain in the country, given that journalists trained in loco could fill his position, and given that no compassionate circumstances were present. See J.E. Blackie, ‘Letter to Holding Redlich & Co.’, 21 June 1977, FMA.

22 Ignazio Salemi, interview with author, 3 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

23 Grievance debate, House of Representatives, 8 August 1977, Hansard: 901.


25 Salemi v Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, MacKellar (No 1) (1976) 137 CLR 388.

27 Salemi v Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, MacKellar (No 2) (1977) 137 CLR 396. 

28 Ibid. 

29 Ibid. 

30 Ibid. 


33 B. Hitchings, ‘7-day reprieve for Italian writer’, The Sun, 8 July 1977. 


39 In November 1976, a first petition totalled more than 11,000 of signatures. A second petition launched in the wake of the May 1977 High Court decision resulted in the collection of around 12,000 signatures by August. 

40 FILEF released six information bulletins in the context of the pro-Salemi campaign, on 16 August, 23 August, 30 August, 6 September, 7 October, and 4 November 1976 respectively. 

41 FILEF, ‘Information bulletin No. 5’, 7 October 1976, FMA. 

42 FILEF, ‘Letter attached to the statement to all unions, community and ethnic organisations on FILEF’s fight for justice’, 6 August 1976, FMA. 


44 ‘We’ll restore Medibank after election – Whitlam’, The Australian, 9 August 1976; ‘Deportation deadline set for Ignazio Salemi’, The Tribune, 11 August 1976. The government action in refusing amnesty to Salemi was for Whitlam a “despicable and dishonest act”.


48 Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Franco Lugarini, interview with author, 9 April 2003, Cerveteri, Province of Roma, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author). 


52 Ibid.: 902. 

54  E. Austin (secretary of the CATU), ‘Letter to K. Stone’ (secretary of the VTHC’), 3 August 1976, FMA.
57  V. Basile, ‘We will help Salemi’, says Hawke, The Age, 31 August 1977.
58  W. Blair (acting secretary of the VBEF, Victorian branch), ‘Letter to [FILEF]’, 21 October 1977, FMA.
59  Ibid.
60  J. Simmonds, ‘Statement’, 21 October 1977, FMA.
61  I am indebted to Professor Roger Douglas of the Law School of La Trobe University for his observations on the Salemi case.
65  A. Sergi, ‘Letter to M. MacKellar’, undated, FMA.
Chapter 9
THE AFTERMATH OF THE SALEMI CASE AND SALEMI’S DEPORTATION

The Salemi case put pressure on FILEF. The rising political career of FILEF secretary Giovanni Sgrò and even the PCI’s position in the relationship between Italy and Australia were potentially at stake. In addition, Salemi’s persona was creating tension among members who opposed his activism and liberal approach. FILEF’s uneasy diarchy of Sgrò and Salemi expressed two different agendas and standpoints, which led to a major division between the ‘young’ and ‘old’ factions. With the deportation of Salemi, the alliance between these two factions broke down and allowed the emergence of the PCI at the expense of FILEF. Many of the original FILEF activists left the organisation and Communist parties, and moved into the Labor Party, the trade unions, academia, and community organisations.1

Strains within FILEF at the conclusion of the Salemi incident

Publicly, FILEF stood firmly behind Salemi throughout his court case. Some sources, however, suggest that Salemi, in the last months of his court case, was losing the backing of some FILEF members, especially that of his peers and the older generation. There were manifold reasons. According to FILEF and PCI activist Franco Lugarini, the Salemi case compromised the relationship between Australia and Italy, in terms of issuing of entry permits to Italian communist officials to come and visit Italian migrants in Australia.2 On the other hand, the case was a source of embarrassment for the PCI, which at that time was engineering the compromesso storico (‘historic compromise’)3 with the ruling Christian Democratic Party (DC). Lugarini recalled:
Una sera abbiamo fatto una festa da ballo, sempre per raccimolà i fondi, e a mezzanotte viene lui [Salemi] de nascosto... Però le cose se stanno a complicà, perché il governo australiano non ci stava a questo sistema, reclamava con l’ambasciata italiana e l’ambasciatore italiano trasmetteva al partito comunista qui [Italy]. Allora il PCI per non complicà le cose – perché se tu ti puntavi poi in Australia non ci veniva più nessuno: Cianca, Volpe, Pajetta, Giadresco, un continuo venì dei compagni – gli hanno detto a Salemi: “Guarda, rientra alle buone in Italia, così restano i buoni rapporti col governo australiano”. [...] Se la protesta era grande? A protestà per lui sì. L’hanno difeso... L’hanno pure nascosto dentro alla chiesa però alla fine per non compromette questi buoni rapporti tra l’Italia e loro, perché a quei tempi c’erano i democristiani ma noi stavamo assieme ai tempi di Berlinguer. Infatti all’ambasciatore italiano gli abbiamo fatto vedè il biglietto per il rientro che lui l’aveva fatto vedè al ministro MacKellar. Però hanno visto che stava in giro per paura di qualche protesta del sindacato, chi lo sa. Insomma l’hanno chiazzato. All’ultimo il caso Salemi era un po’ compromettente, sempre per i rapporti. Ogni cinque sei mesi ci avevamo uno qui de dellà 4.

Moreover, Salemi’s dynamic persona (charismatic and appealing to young FILEF activists) seems to have been ill-suited to the older generation. Frictions had emerged, especially between Salemi and FILEF’s secretary Sgrò; frictions that probably initiated at the time of the ‘Italian communists move in’ incident of 1975 (Chapter 7). Sgrò admitted to Lopez (2000) that he strongly disapproved of Salemi’s activism and did not have second thoughts about whether he should have gone back to Italy: “Salemi got too big [for his] boots, too big for himself. He used to […] go on radio, or whatever, and write anything without consulting the bloody FILEF Committee; and I said to FILEF in Rome, he must go” (Lopez 2000: 403).

Signs of tension between Sgrò and Salemi during the court case were palpable in a letter to MacKellar of 25 May 1977. MacKellar quoted Sgrò’s letter during a grievance debate in Parliament to back his argument that neither Salemi nor FILEF had intended to benefit genuinely from the amnesty offer, but had only filed a request at the instigation of Labor Opposition spokesman Ted Innes:

MacKELLAR: [...] I shall quote from a letter dated 25 May 1977 which I received from Mr Giovanni Sgrò, the secretary of [...] FILEF. The letter in part states: But I felt that we had to defend Mr Salemi’s right...

INNES: You are talking about a different interview.

MacKELLAR: The honourable member should listen to the letter. It states:
But I felt that we had to defend Mr Salemi’s right to stay in Australia—
and it is not so much Mr Salemi who wants to stay here...

Mr Sgrò goes on to say in a later paragraph:
I bring to your attention the fact that Mr. Salemi does not intend to
remain in Australia permanently ...

Later on he said:
I feel that it is within your power and scope to allow Mr. Salemi to stay
here for another twelve to fifteen months at least, and I can assure you
that if we could find a replacement for him, he would leave long before
then\(^5\).

Two months earlier (in March 1977) Sgrò had won a pre-selection bid for the safe State
Labor seat of the Legislative Council’s Melbourne North province. Salemi’s case, and his
pending deportation, could potentially boomerang on Sgrò’s rising political career. The pro-
Salemi campaign therefore began to appear, in Sgrò’s eyes, politically counter-productive.

FILEF’s uneasy diarchy

Sgrò and Salemi constituted the two heads of what Martinengo termed ‘FILEF’s diarchy’\(^6\).
Sgrò and Salemi had notably different stances, which were reflected in their agendas: Sgrò
had a good knowledge of the local reality and was bound hand and foot by the Australian
Labor tradition\(^7\) (integrationalist approach); Salemi had an internationalist approach with an
eye for the contemporary Italian contribution (ethnocentric approach). Sgrò, who came
forward “via the multicultural openings of the ALP”\(^8\), strongly aimed to develop the political
base of FILEF into a Labor Party direction\(^9\). Salemi aspired to piece together old and young
forces in a broad left-wing organisation, to influence the Italian-Australian community as
well as other communities and organisations\(^10\).

Interviewees have given different recollections of both Sgrò and Salemi, which show
their different personalities. Sgrò embodied the features of what Davidson called, in
Gramscian terms, the ‘anarchist type of activist’:
Their personalities, Salemi and Sgrò, were quite different [...]. Sgrò was much more of what you call the anarchist type. A lot of people found Sgrò difficult. He was the kind of person who would say something like, ‘You are a fucking-a-fool-a’, that kind of approach. He has mellowed in his old age, but he was that kind of person. He was always angry. [...]. Johnny Sgrò was more ‘he is really right of the migrant tradition, comes in via the multicultural openings made by the ALP’. Suddenly we start to get, in the Whitlam government, ethnic members of Parliament, ethnic ministers, ethnic, ethnic… He is coming in that kind of route¹¹.

FILEF and PCI activist Edoardo Burani saw in Sgrò a self-made politician with limited cultural capabilities but with brilliant insight, although his election to the Victorian Parliament (1979) opened new challenges for him:

[Sgrò] lo vedeva come un compagno con limitate capacità culturali però uno che si era fatto da sè politicamente, che tutto sommato ci credeva nella lotta politica. Però ad un certo punto è diventato un po’ vittima della situazione, in cui si era venuto a trovare, di parlamentare. Doveva poi agire per avere il consenso della comunità e quindi certe cose che gli si potevano ritorcere in modo contro dal punto di vista del consenso… Lui era un po’ sospettoso. Io tutto sommato do un giudizio positivo di Sgrò, perché lui aveva questa impostazione culturale. Lui era un operaio che si era fatto da sè, che si era impegnato nel partito laburista. Ad un certo punto si trova candidato, chiaro che lui ci teneva senz’altro, viene eletto e si trova in un ruolo più grande di sè, e se ne rende conto. Vede che fa fatica, ma ci ha delle intuizioni da operaio: va in parlamento e fa il primo discorso in italiano, la stampa lo riprende e lui è contento di questa situazione. Un po’ viene travolto da questa notorietà, e con i suoi strumenti culturali ha fatto quello che ha potuto. Chiaro che se aveva gli strumenti culturali superiori sarebbe stata un’altra figura¹².

The recollections of Salemi’s figure emerge in a field of tension between two poles; one pole being represented by some of the old working-class activists such as Emilio Deleidi and Vincenzo Mammoliti and the other by the young activists of FILEF such as Umberto Martinengo, Stefano de Pieri, and Joe Caputo. The latter group of interviewees, who felt both inspired and mentored by Salemi, recalled him as a versatile mind with a solid journalistic and organisational background¹³. He had, in Caputo’s words, “great intellectual capacity combined with excellent organisational skills”; as a person, he was charismatic and charming, a man “who managed to create action around himself”¹⁴.
FILEF lacked activists of a certain calibre who were at least able to write and speak Italian fluently, Caputo explained. Salemi was exactly what FILEF was looking for: a dynamic and resourceful organiser, quick to adapt to the local reality. According to Franco Lugarini, Salemi knew “how to organise things”, from rallies to dinner dances, and transmitted his knowledge to fellow FILEF members. For de Pieri, Salemi was a sharp mind, conscious that all his actions led to specific consequences. He purposely chose not to speak English, for instance, because he believed that migrants had a right to interpreters.

Alastair Davidson, then a young lecturer in politics who invited Salemi to lecture at Monash University, tells something of the political persona of Salemi:

_Salemi was cautious, thoughtful, even though when he talked, he would speak what I call ‘cadre speech’. When he was giving a lecture he was almost always ‘addressing the masses’. His personality was fairly cautious and systematic, and very much, as you say, party man [...] I never saw Salemi angry, he was contained, a bit urbane, in the Roman kind of fashion. He was in the style set by their high level cadres of the Communist party who were very, very signorile. People like Amendola, who could have been a duke in the eighteenth century, that kind of style._

Mammoliti alternatively judged the presence of Salemi in Australia a “mistake”; while for Deleidi, Salemi “ruined” FILEF with his activism, pushing away the moderate elements.

Carli has suggested that Salemi’s liberal manners estranged some FILEF members in another way, which may explain why some interviewees have given very different recollections of him. At the time in his late forties, Salemi expressed a morality that was characteristic the post-68 generation of Italians. This was in clear contrast with the widespread conservative morality, which was typical of the 1950s and 1960s Italian migrants, including those within FILEF:

[…] _Salemi was a bit fond of women. I think that antagonised the older ones, so the sexual politics was disruptive to the organisation […]. You had essentially a communist working class, who were quite conservative about sexual behaviour, mixing with post-68 people who were quite liberal […] plus Salemi. So that left a little bit of a legacy in the organisation […] it did create a fairly big tension between the groups internally._
Salemi felt that the “[...] valanga di cretinate cattive” (avalanche of spiteful idiocies) and “discorsi da lavandaia” (gossiping) that were being muttered about him among fellow members actually hid a power struggle inside FILEF, in which several movers wished to pull the strings in their own interests\(^2\).

The breakdown of the alliance between the ‘young’ and ‘old’ factions

In an open letter to fellow FILEF member Vincenzo Mammoliti of 3 August 1977, two and a half months before his deportation, Salemi envisaged the dangers of factionalism and personalism for FILEF, and reminded Mammoliti to evaluate and treasure what FILEF had so far laboriously achieved:

[…] Si tratta quindi di difendere l’organizzazione nel suo insieme per la prospettiva di sviluppo che essa ha in un momento in cui sta affrontando lotte difficili e sta anche riscuotendo successi di carattere politico che mi sembrano veramente notevoli. Quando il nuovo capo dell’opposizione statale laburista viene di sua volontà a visitare la nostra sede o a parlare con noi, come è avvenuto la settimana scorsa, mi pare sia indicativo di un prestigio che la nostra ha acquistato. Lui aveva chiesto di incontrare me ma io ho voluto che si incontrasse con un gruppo di compagni. Quando un vescovo presbiteriano dichiara pubblicamente che è disposto a nascondere il comunista Salemi significa che la nostra azione – quella di tutti, non la mia – è una cosa che si è guadagnata la stima di tutti. Tutte le altre adesioni alla nostra lotta, in tutti gli stati, non fanno che confermare il significato di risultati di cui dobbiamo troppo e fiorire. […] Quando si arriva, dopo anni di lavoro – spesso incompreso – a una riunione come quella che ha dato vita al Comitato paritetico fra le organizzazioni nazionali italiane significa che più di qualche cosa sta cambiando e che stiamo rompendo l’isolamento a cui vorrebbero condannarci. E anche questa non è nata da sola. […] La candidatura di Sgrò è un successo derivante dalle nostre posizioni pubbliche chiare e che riscuotono fiducia. […] Sono tutte cose che gli avversari mostrano di capire benissimo perché gli attacchi concentrati di cui ci fanno oggetto (McKellar, Globo, Corriere) non hanno altro scopo che quello di farci smettere, o per lo meno di indebolirci, di farci tornare all’isolamento\(^2\).
With Salemi’s deportation, the alliance between the new activists Salemi had gathered around him and the old working-class activists, broke down (Carli 1982: 51) and opened the way to factionalism, according to Cathy Angelone. Carli, who appears to have been the only researcher to look at the implications of Salemi’s deportation for FILEF’s organisational structure, maintained that Salemi’s deportation symbolized the defeat of FILEF’s vanguard elements: the new breed of young activists who would find it increasingly difficult to operate within FILEF and who would gradually abandon the organisation in the following years. This marked the emergence of the PCI:

*The division in FILEF, although often manifested in personal conflict, did focus on a fundamental point. For many of the activists wanted to exploit the new openings in the ALP and the trade unions. They wanted to use FILEF as a broad coordinating organisation for different initiatives, while others, particularly the older activists and in particular Sgrò, wanted to build a tight organisation that would maintain a dialogue with Australian political parties. The irony for Sgrò as an ALP member was that the organisation that would be build up was the PCI and not FILEF. So of the two possible directions, the idea of building the party was taken up. The consequence was that within a few years many members, and in particular the younger cadres with the most contact with Australian organisations, withdrew, leaving FILEF as an isolated sect* (Carli 1982: 51).

The PCI component within FILEF was significant but not the only one: a gamut of political leanings, from anarchic to Labor, characterised the leadership as well as the rank and file, according to Carli who has shed some light on the inner structure of FILEF in the late 1970s. A map of FILEF distinguishes generational as well as political patterns. When Carli joined FILEF in 1978, three generational components were present: ‘old working-class’, ‘post-68’, and ‘second generation’.

The ‘old working-class’ comprised Italian-born members who had migrated to Australia before the Second World War and in the 1950s and 1960s. They had different political experiences in their life in Italy and Australia: some of them, who were Sicilians and Calabrians, had been involved in the land occupations of the late 1940s; others were *laziali* and *piemontesi* who had been ex-partisans during the 1943-1945 Resistance War. Some were former members of *Italia Libera*, such as Charlie D’Aprano (Carli 1982: 13), while
others were concurrently members of the LIA, such as Vincenzo Mammoliti and Emilio Deleidi, who was also an INCA representative.

The second group, the so-called ‘post-68’ types, represented Italian-born members who came to Australia in the course of the 1970s, such as Stefano de Pieri, Roberto Malara, Edoardo Burani, Umberto Martinengo, Carlo Scalvini, and Cira La Gioia. While some of them were “strictly PCI”, many were not; some were once involved in the anarchic movement and in various Marxist organisations in Italy.27

The third group, the so-called ‘second generation’, included those members who were either born or raised in Australia, such as Carli himself, Gianfranco Spinoso, Joe Lo Bianco, Cathy Angelone, and to an extent Joe Caputo.28

Although many members experienced “a lot of cross-membership”29—Joe Caputo was a classic example: he was simultaneously member of the LIA, the Clothing Union, the CPA, the PCI, and FILEF—one could distinguish three major political poles towards which FILEF members gravitated: the ALP, the PCI and “community politics”30. In the latter area, some of FILEF Melbourne’s activists followed particular political agendas: this was the case, for instance, for Joe Lo Bianco, who advocated the teaching of community languages in Australian State schools and later became a major academic figure in the area of language teaching.31

Salemi’s ethnocentric yet internationalist approach to politics represented a compromise between the three major political poles, which many in FILEF identified with. For Carli, with the deportation of Salemi the PCI

[… ] became too dominant, too many people who were too nostalgic and looking towards the PCI in Italy for inspiration. There was a very close link there; there would be PCI people sent from Italy to give direction and guidance and all of that. […] I have never quite worked out what they wanted to create in the end, I mean I was quite influenced by the PCI, but at the same time, at the end of the day I became very critical of it because I didn’t think they had quite a sense of what they wanted to do here.32

In 1979, the PCI cells and branches formed the Australian PCI Federation, now fully recognised as a federation by the PCI in Rome, under the secretariat of Carlo Scalvini and Renato Licata. A founding congress in Melbourne in February 1979 marked the event. The
Australian PCI Federation was closely structured according to the model of the federations in Italy, where a number of commissioni (committees) articulated policies and initiatives. According to de Pieri, the Australian PCI Federation was obsessively looking towards the Italian political scene rather the Australian one, and this reduced the influence of FILEF. Stefania Pieri, who joined FILEF and the PCI in the late 1970s and attended a six-month course at the communist college Le Frattocchie in Rome in the early 1980s, recalled that some members of the Australian PCI Federation were progressively loosing touch with the Australian political reality:

Dopo questa esperienza [Le Frattocchie] sono tornata in Australia proprio a lavorare per il partito, e la FILEF... Lavoravo nell’organizzazione. Avevamo il compito di organizzare chi si sentiva legato ad un modo di fare politica, anche se in Australia. Io lo facevo con uno spirito, sinceramente, di favorire la partecipazione dei vecchi italiani nella politica australiana. Non l’ho mai inteso come un ghetto la mia appartenenza al PCI giù. Questa posizione non era però corrisposta da tutti.

Diciamo che molti osteggiavano un po’ questo. Io mi ricordo così. Questo era uno dei grandi dibattiti all’inizio degli anni Ottanta: se partecipare organicamente alla politica australiana, militando nelle organizzazioni australiane – come io penso sarebbe stato naturale, anche come comunisti italiani – o se rafforzare esclusivamente la nostra organizzazione, e in qualche modo confrontarci dialetticamente. Comunque era un confronto, un costruire da dentro un’ipotesi alternativa a quella tradizionale laburista, però stare dentro.

Questo era un po’ il dibattito negli anni Ottanta e io ho inteso la mia partecipazione e la mia militanza nel PCI in questa chiave, cioè io volevo come comunista italiano portare il mio contributo nella politica australiana, se rimanevo lì, come Carlo Carli, Stefano, e tutte queste persone che erano giovani. E su questo ci fu tanto dibattito, anche tanti scontri, incomprensioni che poi si intrecciavano sicuramente a personalismi, ambizioni personali. Questo era stato uno dei grandi temi di spaccature: come partecipare nella politica australiana. [...]  

Mi ricordo proprio i documenti ‘la terza via del socialismo in Australia’. Mutuavano quell’afflato, quelle cose italiane che venivano riportate in maniera abbastanza schematica. Io il pericolo l’avvertevo. Io ero più giovane, molto più giovane, frequentavo i giovani australiani cosa che credo loro non facessero molto, e capivo che quel tipo di dinamica poteva creare solo dei fraintendimenti, ma soprattutto non portava lontano. Non era una cosa autoctona, era una cosa che veniva da lontano.
Joe Caputo joined the ALP after his FILEF membership ticket was abruptly revoked in 1980 – it was alleged that he had passed on distorted and defamatory information about FILEF and Sgrò to *The Age*\(^{35}\). His memories about his experiences in the PCI and in FILEF highlight the limits and contradictions that these two organisations carried within them:

Credo che sia stato uno sbaglio da parte nostra quello di organizzarci come PCI. In una società pluralista, uno può fare quello che vuole, però dico tatticamente come movimento progressista, secondo me, non è stata una buona idea, guardando indietro. Io ero uno dei protagonisti, lo ammetto adesso trent'anni dopo. Un paio di anni dopo che Salemi è stato espulso, incominciai a riflettere e mi sono reso conto per due ragioni, una è perché non eravamo noi a decidere la direzione nostra. Anche nel nostro piccolo, le decisioni erano fatte a Roma, con molta arroganza. [...] L'altra riflessione che io aveva fatto era che noi come comunisti italiani parlevamo contro l'interferenza degli altri paesi, particolarmente dell'Unione Sovietica—perché come PCI non volevamo l'interferenza dell'Unione Sovietica—però noi facevamo ugualmente. In tutte le discussioni che facevamo, io mi ricordo, e non era soltanto per il fatto che io ero nel CPA e che ci avevi le due tessere del CPA e del PCI, si era diventati anche noi, e non ci rendevamo conto, sciovinisti. Cioè tutto quello che era in Italia era: grossi quadri, bravi pensatori, gli intellettuali, la linea dell'eurocomunismo e così via. Tutto quello che era australiano era: sono dei coglioni, inefficienti, è tutto da buttare. Questo non ci portava a fare un’analisi seria della cosa perché gli australiani non erano tutti coglioni, non erano tutti da buttare; era che gli australiani e l’Australia erano una realtà estremamente difficile da lavorarci dentro. Per noi era molto facile. Anzi, più ti rinchiudi nel tuo guscio, più critichi tutti gli altri, perché non è che devi andare fuori e parlare con qualcuno. Hai capito? Questa era anche la contraddizione che noi eravamo. [...] Quando mi sono reso conto di questo mi sono detto no, e da allora mi sono iscritto al partito laburista. [...] Si era creato anche un certo mito che la FILEF era un’organizzazione attiva e dinamica, ed era anche vero, c’era un periodo di tre, quattro anni, dal 1974 fino al 1977 dove la FILEF era attiva, coinvolta, Nuovo Paese usciva regolarmente, era un giornale quindicinale, ma non c’è mai stata una penetrazione all’interno della comunità italiana. Gli abbonamenti erano sì e no un centinaio, e non erano sufficienti per coprire nemmeno le spese di distribuzione. Noi eravamo sempre in prima fila con gli striscioni, questo e quell’altro. Facevamo molto più chiasso in realtà di quanto appoggio avevamo. [...] [Se l’esperienza della FILEF se è stata positiva o negativa?] Ci sono state delle cose che erano certamente positive. Noi eravamo coinvolti, per esempio, con altre comunità a promuovere certi principi, e ne abbiamo fatte di lotte. Abbiamo ottenuto secondo me alcune vittorie, non da soli ma
In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Carli argued, many young FILEF activists became aware that their influence “could probably go elsewhere”\(^{37}\). Umberto Martinengo became La Fiamma journalist and later SBS radio host and COASIT education co-ordinator, Joe Lo Bianco became involved in academia, Cathy Angelone was involved in the trade unions before re-migrating to Italy, Stefano de Pieri, Joe Caputo and Carlo Carli joined the ALP and held important positions at local and state levels (in 1994, Carli was elected to the Victorian Parliament for the State seat of Coburg; he is currently the member of the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Victoria for the seat of Brunswick).

Eventually, FILEF no longer functioned as the liaison with mainstream Australian politics, as the emergence of the PCI element put more emphasis on Italian politics. The PCI wished to keep a political culture and tradition alive, given that was still attractive to some left-wing Italians but increasingly becoming anachronistic in so doing, it mingled less and less with the Australian Left.

Notes to Chapter 9

1  Excerpts from this chapter were published in Battiston (2005).
2  Franco Lugarini, interview with author, 9 April 2003, Cerveteri, Province of Roma, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
3  Through the *compromesso storico*, the PCI in the Opposition was to obtain a more active role and a more sympathetic relationship with the Italian government.
4  Franco Lugarini, interview with author, 9 April 2003, Cerveteri, Province of Roma, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
6  Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
Ibid.

8 Alastair Davidson, interview with author, 16 December 2003, Hawthorn, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

9 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 5 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

Ibid.

10 Alastair Davidson, interview with author, 16 December 2003, Hawthorn, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

11 Edoardo Burani, interview with author, 26 March 2003, Modena, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

12 Umberto Martinengo, interview with author, 24 December 2002, Carlton, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


15 Franco Lugarini, interview with author, 9 April 2003, Cerveteri, Province of Roma, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


17 Alastair Davidson, interview with author, 16 December 2003, Hawthorn, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

18 Vincenzo Mammoliti, interview with author, 8 April 2002, Bulla, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

19 Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

20 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).


23 Cathy Angelone, interview with author, 13 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

24 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
33 Stefano de Pieri, interview with author, 22 January 2004, Anglesea, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
34 Stefania Pieri, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
36 Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
37 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
CONCLUSION

The rise of FILEF in Melbourne in the 1970s can be viewed within two historic frameworks: the new political environment brought about by the Whitlam government, which paved the way, among other things, for the development of movements and organisations advocating ethnic consciousness and ethnic rights; and the political awakening of the Italian-Australian Left in the 1970s, which saw the link with the PCI as a means of regrouping and of gaining influence in the Italian-Australian community.

Like previous similar organisations, such as the *Lega Italo-Australiana* (LIA), FILEF aimed to speak for the large working-class strata of Italians living in Melbourne, whose socio-economic circumstances in the urban centres still left them subject to disadvantage and discrimination. Unlike the LIA, however, FILEF operated in a new political climate and could count on leading figures such as Italian-born activists Ignazio Salemi and Giovanni Sgrò. Moreover, it gathered a new breed of young activists under its banner, some who had emigrated from Italy in the course of the 1970s, others who had been born in Australia. Together they constituted the most dynamic force in the organisation. Salemi in particular galvanised them into action on several fronts and encouraged a qualitative cultural and political shift in the organisation of activities and initiatives.

Through Ignazio Salemi and Giuliano Pajetta (Italy’s PCI Emigration Office), FILEF maintained close ties with the PCI, while at the same time it forged close links with Labor, at local and federal level, through Giovanni Sgrò. During the Whitlam government, the ALP enjoyed its relationship with grass-roots organisations such as FILEF, which seemed to have quite an influence on the Italian vote in its constituency.

The reasons behind the decline of FILEF Melbourne between the early 1970s and the early 1980s seem to lie in external (e.g. changing of Australian political climate, pressure from conservative quarters) as well as internal factors (e.g. the different dynamics of the
three political components within the organisation, namely ALP, PCI, and community politics).

Italian and Australian conservative quarters gravitating towards the newspaper *Il Globo* and the Liberal Party felt alarmed by FILEF and its militant activism. The ‘Italian communists move in’ incident, which supposedly led to the arson attempt on the FILEF and *Nuovo Paese* office, shocked many FILEF members and supporters. On the other hand, it attracted great support and media attention, which raised the organisation’s profile. In the long term, nevertheless, it cast a negative light on Salemi who was pictured, by the Italian-language conservative press, as a red firebrand. The Salemi case saw the climax and denouement of the confrontation between FILEF, backed by prominent elements of the Australian Left, and the Fraser Liberal government, in the person of its Immigration Minister Michael MacKellar.

The subsequent deportation of Salemi did not only leave FILEF without a skilful organiser but also left the vanguard young without clear direction. With Sgrò on his way to become the first Italian-born Member of the Victorian Parliament, the PCI element within FILEF eventually became the leading faction and opted to strengthen the PCI ranks by founding the Australian PCI Federation. Many young activists found difficult to interact in the new environment and moved on towards other organisations, including the ALP. For these activists, FILEF had become the launching platform for a series of initiatives at community level, as well as a crucial stepping stone for their personal careers, whether in politics or in other sectors in Australia.

There is no doubt that eyewitness accounts of participants in FILEF’s past events gathered for this research have proven to be pivotal and challenging for the purpose of historical reconstruction of FILEF Melbourne’s past. The significance of these oral history interviews rests in the fact that they tell us, in Portelli’s words, “less about events than about their meaning” (1998: 67). Given that “memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meaning” (*ibid.*: 69), these oral sources attached significant meanings to the events.

Moreover, although they form only a tiny fraction of the oral testimonies potentially available, the oral testimonies so far collected have allowed the construction of a multi-sided and complex history of FILEF Melbourne. Not only do they point to new areas of
enquiry (for instance, the legacy left by FILEF leaders Sgrò and Salemi to the organisation and its members, and the extent to which their differences may have influenced the evolution of FILEF in Melbourne), but they have also opened a unique window on what constitutes a surviving fragment of what might be arguably called ‘collective’ oral memory itself. The oral testimonies form intricate narrative webs in which past historical events are tightly interwoven with personal stories, aspirations, frustrations and dreams. They have been particularly evocative, as discussed in the last chapter, of the interactions among FILEF members in a way that has suggested the presence of important frictions and tensions in the organisation and that reveals part of the inner workings of FILEF in the 1970s.

As a result of the limitations of time and resources, some areas of enquiry into the history of FILEF have remained under-explored, such as the role played by FILEF in the campaign for Italian-language teaching, the cultural events and educational initiatives held by FILEF, and the activities and roles played by the FILEF Women’s Group in the Italian-Australian community. Hopefully, these will be subject of research in the near future. Although necessarily incomplete and limited in its scope, the current project constitutes a significant deviation from mainstream histories of FILEF Melbourne in that it uses literature, archival material and oral testimonies, some of which has not been used before, and as a result allows new inferences to be drawn.
APPENDIX 1 – BIOGRAPHY INDEX

In this section, twenty-six biographical notes of people cited in this research are presented.

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Abbiezzi, Mario (born 1907, Busto Arsizio, Milan, Italy; died 1986, Sydney, Australia) joined the PCI at the age of eighteen. In 1934, he was arrested for anti-fascist activity and imprisoned for two years. Released in 1936, he was shortly after arrested for subversive activity and sentenced for eight years in prison. In 1939, he was released under surveillance. His underground activity alongside PCI members again led to his arrest in 1942. With the fall of Fascism on 25 July 1943, Abbiezzi headed a political insurrection in the town prison of San Vittore where he was detained. Accused of taking part in the revolt, he and a fellow inmate were sentenced to death. However, an allied air raid bombing of Milan took place before the sentence could be carried out. The prison was hit, forcing the prison guards to suspend the execution. Transferred to another prison some two months later, Abbiezzi succeeded in having his political prisoner’s papers lost and a new set of military judges later released him. In the wake of the armistice of 8 September 1943, he helped organise the Gruppi di Azione Patriottica (Groups of Patriotic Action) of Milan, which carried out acts of sabotage and urban guerrilla warfare against the Nazi-Fascists. Wanted in 1944 by the Gestapo, he took refuge in the Valtellina Mountains where he joined the 52nd Partisan Brigade Garibaldi becoming the ‘commandante Maio’. In late April 1945, he took part with units of the Garibaldi Brigade, in the arrest of Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, who was fleeing to Switzerland. As the war ended, Abbiezzi was appointed Questore (Police superintendent) of the province of Sondrio, an office that he held until 1947. After the historic electoral defeat of the Fronte Popolare (Socialist-Communist Coalition) of 1948, he made the decision, in 1949, to come to Australia “to look around”1. In Sydney, he met with members of the Italo-Australian Club who soon asked him to be the club’s secretary. He stayed and later became the editor of newspaper Il Risveglio. In 1953, the Australian Government issued a deportation order for his left-wing militancy and for the critique of the Italian emigration and Australian immigration policies published in Il Risveglio. Abbiezzi fled to Darwin where he was arrested and jailed for twelve days. Flown back to Sydney, he was detained in Long Bay for a further four weeks. While in detention, a movement of support on his behalf was formed, which put pressure on the government. A Committee in Defence of Mario Abbiezzi was set up and a petition for signatures was circulated, resulting in the collection of more than 10,000 signatures. In Sydney, the Australian Left and the Trade Union Movement held demonstrations of support. He was eventually allowed to stay but was
denied Australian citizenship for years. In the 1960s, Abbiezzi opened the *Bar Garibaldi* in Darlinghurst, Sydney. The bar became the preferred meeting points for Italians of the area. Around 1966, he edited the monthly *Il Nuovo Paese* after the periodical’s main office was transferred from Melbourne to Sydney. In the early 1970s, he was the founding member of the Australian PCI and FILEF branches in Sydney. He died in 1986. His remains were cremated and buried in the Botany cemetery.

**Angelone**, ‘Cathy’ Caterina (born 1954, Bruzzone Zeffirio, Reggio Calabria, Italy) migrated to Australia with her mother and her siblings around 1958, joining her father who had migrated a few years earlier. Raised in the Melbourne working-class suburb of Coburg, Cathy pursued her studies up to tertiary level, when she enrolled in an Arts degree at La Trobe University. Around 1974, she began attending meetings at the Melbourne branch of FILEF, of which her brother-in-law Umberto Frattali was president. Contrary to her family’s wishes, she dropped out of university and dedicated herself to FILEF. In November 1974, under the federal government-funded Welfare Rights Officer Program, she was employed full-time in the FILEF welfare office. She played a crucial organisational role during the campaign to keep deportee and FILEF migrant rights activist Ignazio Salemi in Australia. In May 1977, she was a delegate of the FILEF Women’s Group to a conference on women’s rights in Manila, the Philippines. In 1978, she resigned from the position of social worker at FILEF and began working as secretary at the Australian Railways Union, where she remained until 1980. In 1981, she migrated back to Italy where she joined Ignazio Salemi, who was her lifelong companion, in Rome. She still lives in Rome.

**Burani**, Edoardo (born 1948, Cortile di Carpi, Modena, Italy), a son of tenant farmers, dropped out of school at the age of sixteen and began working in a shirt-manufacturing factory in Carpi. In the late 1960s, he began to sympathise with left-wing politics and became an activist in the trade union CISL. While travelling with a friend throughout Asia and Australia in 1974-75, he decided to remain in Australia, where he soon encountered members of FILEF in Sydney. His initial on-and-off involvement in FILEF activities turned into a full-time commitment in 1976, when he was granted permanent residency under the amnesty. He
particularly committed himself to the campaign for the teaching of community languages in
Australian State schools. In 1981, he and his partner, FILEF activist Pierina Pirisi, were
asked by FILEF and the PCI to move to Melbourne to improve the fortunes of the Melbourne
branch of FILEF. Burani was employed as proof reader for Nuovo Paese. He and Pirisi
returned to Italy in 1984 and settled in Modena. They married the following year. Burani
currently works for the Modena disposal company META Spa².

Caputo, ‘Joe’ Giuseppe (born 1949, Carpino, Foggia, Italy) migrated with his family from
Apulia to Brazil in the mid-1950s. In the early 1960s, as a coup d’état saw the military seize
power and as social conditions were deteriorating rapidly, the Caputos managed to buy their
own fares through the sale of their assets in Brazil and moved to Australia. To help his family
recover financially, Caputo worked for years in the textile industry. His first public political
involvement was in the Vietnam War Moratorium Campaign. He then joined the trade union
CATU, of which he later became shop steward and official, the CPA, FILEF, and the local
PCI. Caputo began to be involved in FILEF around 1972. In 1975, he was one of FILEF’s
delegates representing the Italian-Australian community at the World Conference on Italian
Emigration. In the late 1970s he advocated for the establishment of consigli di fabbrica
(factory councils). About half a dozen factory councils were established in factories located
in the Fitzroy and Brunswick areas, such as Sterling, Glo Weave, Fletcher Jones, Latooof and
Callil, and Yakka. His involvement in the PCI and in FILEF ceased in 1980, when he was
abruptly expelled from the latter, during a period of political ‘purges’. Simultaneously, he
joined the ALP. Since the 1980s, Caputo has been elected several times as councillor and
major of Coburg, now Moreland City Council (Brunswick City Council and Brunswick Oral
History Project 1985: 88-94). He is currently the Moreland City Councillor of the Hoffman
ward and lives in Brunswick⁵.

Carli, Carlo (born 1960, Melbourne, Australia) grew up in Coburg, where his family
migrated from Asiago, Veneto in 1951. Carli worked alongside his father at General Motors
during his student years. In 1975, he went on student demonstrations against the dismissal of
the Whitlam government, while a few years later, he was involved in the Anti-uranium Movement. Around 1978, he started a Politics degree at Melbourne University and got involved in the left wing of the student movement. Around this time, he also became also involved in FILEF. Like many other young FILEF members, Carli held memberships of the PCI and the CPA. In the early 1980s, however, he joined the ALP and did a stint as Ministerial Adviser in Housing in the twilight months of the Kirner State Government. In May 1994, he was elected to the Victorian Parliament for the State seat of Coburg. He is currently the member of the Legislative Assembly in the Parliament of Victoria for the seat of Brunswick and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure. He married Siobhán Hannan and lives in Brunswick.

**Carmagnola, Francesco** (born 1900, San Vito Leguzzano, Vicenza, Italy; died 1986, Sydney, Australia) was one of the most significant political figures of the Italian-Australian anti-fascist movement of the 1930s and 40’s in Sydney. He was forced to emigrate to Australia in 1922 because of Fascists death threats to him and his family for his prominent role in the strikes and occupations of factories in the Vicenza province during the post-World War I industrial conflicts. In Australia, he initially worked as a canecutter in Queensland and later as a factory worker in Melbourne and Sydney, where he continued his anti-fascist activity as one of the promoters of the campaign in support of the two Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti framed for murder in the United States and later sentenced to death. In July 1927, he began publication of the short-lived anti-fascist periodical *Il Risveglio*, closed down by the Australian authorities at the urging of the Italian Consul-General of Sydney for its anarchic and anti-fascist content. Moving to Melbourne, in December 1927 he established the anti-fascist *Matteotti Club*. In 1930, he received permission to publish the anarchist newspaper *La Riscossa*, which had begun publication illegally the year before. *La Riscossa* followed the same fate of *Il Risveglio* when a conservative federal government took office and ordered its closure, along with another anarchic newspaper, *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, in 1932. In 1932, Carmagnola was brought to trial for having assaulted the Italian Vice-Consul Mario Melano in Ingham, North Queensland. Shrewdly, he used “this platform to launch a scathing attack against fascism” (Cresciani 1988b: 141). The jury, composed mainly of
sympathetic waterside workers, found him not guilty. During the Depression Years he was
instrumental in organising industrial actions such as Weil’s Disease strike of 1934, when
cane cutters demanded employers to adopt the practice of burning off the cane to eradicate the
deadly Weil’s disease (Pascoe 1989: 203). In July 1940, he was arrested for handing out
leaflets of anti-fascist and anarchic propaganda, and later interned for being an enemy alien.
During the post-war period he was no longer an active militant, although he stayed interested
in Australian and international politics. He died in Sydney in 1986. During his funeral, he
was saluted by anarchist black flags and hymn *Addio Lugano bella*.

**Davidson, Alastair** (born 1939, Fiji Islands) grew up on the Pacific islands of Fiji, where he
lived up to the age of sixteen. His father William, a lawyer for the Indian Cane Workers
Association, belonged to one of the oldest white families of Fiji that originally came from
India; Davidson’s grandfather was brought to Fiji as an interpreter for the indentured Indian
labour. His mother was a teacher of Irish origin. In 1955, Davidson’s father died and the
family moved to England, before migrating on the ten-pound fare to Australia in 1958. In
both England and Australia, Davidson attended university courses in which he encountered
radical literature on Marxism and Leninism. His major intellectual influences of the time
were Eric Hobsbawm and Manning Clark. In the early 1960s, he won a one-year scholarship
to go to Rome where he became interested in Antonio Gramsci. Having completed his PhD
on the history of the Communist Party of Australia at the ANU in Canberra, he started his
long-standing academic career as becoming a lecturer in International Relations and Russian
Politics at Monash University in 1966. In the 1970s, he became involved with the PCI and
FILEF and was regularly invited to FILEF and PCI meetings to give lectures on Gramsci and
Gramscism. Since the late 1980s, his major topics of interest and academic research have
been globalisation, citizenship and human rights. Davidson currently divides his time between
France and Australia and has lately been appointed Professor of History and Politics at the
University of Wollongong.
de Pieri, Stefano (born 1955, Treviso, Italy) grew up in a farmhouse in Dosson, Veneto. He dropped out of school at the age of fifteen and started working in a local factory. In 1972, he joined the FGCI. In 1974, he migrated to Australia where he stayed with the Hannans, a highly educated and progressive couple that belonged to the left-wing intelligentsia of Melbourne. Within months after his arrival, he joined the CPA, FILEF and the PCI. In 1976, he attended a two-month training course at the communist college Le Frattocchie in Rome. Under the mentorship of Ignazio Salemi, he collaborated with FILEF's Nuovo Paese, of which he later became editor (1978-80). Towards the end of the 1970s, de Pieri took over a pizza shop in East Brunswick with Romolo Sestito, a sociology student at La Trobe University and an ALP member. When Sestito was offered a tutorship in 1980, de Pieri did not have enough funds to take over the business and it was sold. In 1980, de Pieri, with a group of friends, applied to the State of Victoria for a business grant. They received $51,000 and opened café-restaurant L'Osteria on Lygon Street, Brunswick. In 1983, he left L'Osteria and began working with renowned chef Raymond Fenech at Zac's in Kensington. In the mid-1980s, he joined the ALP and worked his way up in the party. In 1984, de Pieri graduated in Arts at the University of Melbourne and began working with Demetri Dollis who was later elected for the safe Labor seat of Richmond in 1988, in the Victorian Department of Ethnic Affairs. Dollis was instrumental in inspiring de Pieri to start thinking about entering the state political arena. In 1986, Stefano was awarded a clerical position in the office of the Minister for Ethnic Affairs, Peter Spyker. When Dollis who was Spyker's ministerial adviser was elected in 1988, de Pieri replaced him and worked for Premiers John Cain and Joan Kirner. In 1991, his rising political career halted abruptly when he unsuccessfully attempted to win the preselection for the Victorian seat of North Melbourne. Abandoning the idea of having a political career, he followed his long-standing passion for cooking and made a name for himself as one of Victoria’s most celebrated country chefs. He married Donata Carrazza in 1991 and established a well-known restaurant/hotel complex in Donata’s hometown, Mildura. In 1999, de Pieri was host of the ABC TV series A Gondola on the Murray (Armstrong 2001: passim).9.
Deleidi, Emilio (born 1918, Lovere, Bergamo, Italy; died 2006, Melbourne) was a CGIL trade union activist and a shop committee secretary at the engineering factory ILVA in Bergamo in the post-war period. In 1957, he migrated to Australia with his family and began working as a skilled metalworker at an iron foundry in Brunswick, Melbourne. In 1958, he co-founded the left-wing migrant organisation LIA, and began his long-standing voluntary work for the Italian community in the welfare sector as a representative of the INCA, the welfare arm of CGIL. Between 1963 and 1966, he held the editorship of the LIA monthly Il Nuovo Paese, before the periodical moved to Sydney. During the 1970s and 80’s, Deleidi’s commitment to community welfare issues intensified and he joined FILEF. In 1975, he was one of FILEF’s delegates representing the Italian-Australian community at the World Conference on Italian Emigration in Rome. Between 1977 and 1987, he was a welfare committee member of the NOW Welfare Centre of Coburg. Between 1978 and 1983, he was migrant service officer for the City of Sunshine. Between 1987 and 1990, he was co-ordinator and public relations officer of the Gruppo di studio dei patronati italiani. Deleidi’s commitment to the welfare of the Italian-Australia community was later acknowledged. In 1982, he was made knight of the Italian Republic for service to the Italian and Australian communities; in 1986, he was awarded the OAM. Deleidi retired in 1981, yet he continued for years to advise fellow migrants on welfare and pensioner issues (Lowenstein and Loh 1978: 37-38; The Australian Roll of Honour 1975-96: 285). Deleidi died in 200610.

Diele, Tom (born 1928, Altamura, Bari, Italy; died 2001, Melbourne, Australia) was a versatile figure of FILEF Melbourne. In the 1970s, he was secretary of the FILEF Art Group and organiser of various art exhibitions. He was also consultore all’estero (overseas advisor) for the Apulia Regional Government, as well as painter and restaurateur. He died in Melbourne in 200111.

Levi, Carlo (born 1902, Turin, Italy; died 1975, Rome, Italy) came from a liberal upper-class family of Turin. He graduated in medicine but followed his real passions: arts (writing and painting) and politics. In 1934, he was arrested for his anti-fascist activities and sentenced to
one year of *confino* (political confinement) in a remote and bleak village in southern Italy, Aliano. In this southern village, he entered “a world cut off from history and the state, hedged in by custom and sorrow, without comfort or solace, where, eternally patient, the peasants lived in an age-old stillness and in the presence of death”\(^{12}\). In 1936, he fled to France, from where he returned to Italy in 1942. There, he joined the Italian Resistance movement. In 1943 he wrote his best-known book, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli), which drew inspiration from his *confino* experience. The book is a denouncement of the extreme backwardness of the social conditions suffered by the peasant class of the South during Fascism. From 1962 to 1973, he was elected independent left-wing senator. In 1967, he was promoter and first president of FILEF. He died in Rome in 1975\(^ {13} \).

**Lugarini**, Franco (born 1926, Frascati, Rome, Italy; died 2004, Cerveteri, Rome, Italy) grew up in Civitavecchia. From the age of twelve he followed his father’s example, carrying on the family trade of hairdresser. On the night of Good Friday, 1944, Lugarini was caught in a raid of German troops in the area of the towns of Tolfa and Allumiere and jailed. During his month-and-a-half imprisonment—he later managed to escape—his political inclination matured through his encounters with activists of the underground PCI network. Charmed by post-war, Hollywood-produced films on exotic and far-away countries, he migrated to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1954, where he stayed for two years. In 1960, he married Anna Maria Deiana and together they migrated to Australia in the following year. In 1963, his wife longed to go home and they decided to return to Italy. They returned to Australia in 1970. In 1971, Lugarini became acquainted with Giuseppe Archivio who introduced him to the cell of Italian communists of the underground club of Thomastown, later known as the PCI cultural club Giuseppe Di Vittorio. FILEF and the PCI formed in 1971 and 1972, and Franco joined them. In 1973, he co-founded the PCI branch *Antonio Gramsci* of Coburg. In 1975, he was one of FILEF’s delegates representing the Italian-Australian at the World Conference on Italian Emigration in Rome, as well as CCIE advisor. As a PCI member, Lugarini was a tireless organiser, especially of the *Feste de L’Unità* at the Albion Hall of Brunswick in the 1970s and in the Fitzroy and Coburg parks in the early 1980s. In 1977, he was dubbed *commendatore* of the Italian Republic *con la stella della solidarietà* (with a solidarity award).
In 1978, he was appointed consultore all’estero (overseas advisor) of the Lazio Regional Government. In 1982, he was appointed member of the COMITES Melbourne. He retired in 1992 and moved back to Italy, where he died in 2004\(^4\).

**Malara**, Roberto (born 1948, Reggio Calabria, Italy) graduated in Biology and Medical Technology at the University of Perugia in the 1970s. He migrated to Australia in 1978 and became involved in FILEF Melbourne in 1979, where he briefly held the position of secretary. In the 1980s, he mainly resided in Sydney and became involved in FILEF Sydney. He conducted a series of activities in the Leichhardt area, among which the establishment of the FILEF Theatre Group that staged five productions sponsored by the Australian Council of Arts, and the collection of migrant women’s life histories. The latter project led to a theatre production, *Storia di una cosa*, and a homonymous TV production directed by Fabio Cavadini and produced by SBS. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, Malara held various positions as officer in the Arts and Social Activities units of the Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney City Councils. Since 2001 he has resided in Thornbury, Melbourne, and he currently works as Community Grants officer at the Darebin City Council\(^5\).

**Mammoliti**, Vincenzo (born 1926, Bella di Nicastro [later renamed Lamezia Terme], Catanzaro, Italy; died 2002, Melbourne, Australia) worked in the 1940s as a farm labourer in the large landed estate of baron Nicotera of Bella di Nicastro. In 1943, he joined first the PSI and then the PCI. In 1949, he participated in the occupation of the large landed estates in Southern Italy. In 1951, he migrated to Australia, where he worked in several factories and on building sites before establishing his own cleaning business at the beginning of the 1960s. After his arrival in Australia, Mammoliti participated in political and community activities in various left-wing organisations: in the LIA of Melbourne from the 1950s to the 1970s, in the CPA until 1967, and in the SPA and FILEF in the 1970s. In 1979, he moved to Bulla, north of Melbourne due to health concerns, *de facto* ceasing his involvement in FILEF and other socio-political organisations. Mammoliti died in Melbourne in 2002\(^6\).
Martinengo, Umberto (born 1946, Milan, Italy), a graduate in Arts at the State University of Milan, migrated to Australia in 1973. In 1975 he completed his Diploma of Education at La Trobe University and began teaching at Brunswick Girls High School. Soon after, however, he became acquainted with FILEF, quit his teaching job and started working at *Nuovo Paese*, of which he was editor between 1976 and 1978. In 1978, he ceased his involvement in FILEF and began working for the bi-weekly *La Fiamma*. Later, he became education programs co-ordinator of COASIT. He joined SBS’s Italian-language program as radio host in 1982. He currently lives in Melbourne¹⁷.

Napolitano, Giorgio (born 1925, Naples, Italy) was one of the young voices of the cultural-political movement of *nuovo meridionalismo*, which campaigned against the malaise of South Italy in the 1950s¹⁸. A Law graduated and PCI official, he was elected member of the Chamber of Deputies from 1953 to 1996 and European MP from 1989 to 1992. From 1992 to 1994, he was Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and from 1996 to 1998, Minister for the Interior. He currently lives in Naples¹⁹.

Novelli, Diego (born 1931, Turin, Italy) was journalist of *L’Unità*, of which became editor of the Turin office from 1961 to 1975. From 1975 to 1983, he was Mayor of Turin. From 1984 to 1989, he was European MP of the PCI and from 1987 to 2001 PCI (then PDS and DS) member of the Chamber of Deputies. In 1988, he co-founded the association *L'Altritalia* and its weekly *Avvenimenti*. In 1990, he was a founding member of the pro-democracy movement *La Rete*. He published several books, among which *Dossier FIAT* (1970), *Sicilia ’71: una società disgregata* (1971), and *Il decennio della follia* (1989). He co-wrote with director Ettore Scola the story and the film-script for the movie *Trevico-Torino, viaggio nella Fiatnam* (1973). He has recently published his memoirs, *Per coerenza: stralci di vita di un militante di sinistra non pentito* (2004). He currently lives in Turin²⁰.
Pajetta, Giuliano (born 1915, Turin, Italy; died 1988, Livorno, Italy) joined the PCI youth ranks in 1930. Between 1932 and 1936, he attended the Leninist College in Moscow, became a militant of the Komosomol in the Ukraine and the Crimea, and supervised the Italian-speaking youth communist movements in France. In 1936, he took part in the Spanish Civil War as political advisor and collaborator of PCI senior member Luigi Longo, who was at the head of the International Brigades. When he returned to France in 1939, he was arrested and interned in the camps of Vernet and Les Milles, from which he later managed to escape. After his covert return to Italy, he was arrested in 1943 by the Nazi-Fascists because of his membership of the Italian resistance brigade Garibaldi and deported to the German concentration camp of Mauthausen in 1944. After the war he became secretary of the PCI federation of Como and a member of the Constituent Assembly. From 1953 to 1958, Pajetta was elected member of the Chamber of Deputies, and afterwards senator and member of the PCI Central Committee. He held several positions in the PCI, especially in the foreign and emigration affairs department. From 1972 to the early 1980s, he held the PCI Emigration Office. He died in Livorno in 1988.

Palazzolo, Salvatore (born 1922, Santa Venerina, Catania, Italy; died 1982, Sydney, Australia) was a founding member of the PCI in Sydney and its secretary, from 1971 to 1973. He died in Sydney in 1982.

Pieri, Stefania (born 1960, Rome, Italy) grew up in Rome. In 1974, her parents made the decision to migrate to Australia by means of assisted passage. Initially housed in the migrant hostel of Maribyrnong, Melbourne, the Pieris later settled in Brunswick. In 1978, Pieri began her long-lasting involvement in FILEF and the PCI. Around 1983, she returned permanently to Italy, where she worked for several theatre companies and FILEF in Rome. She currently lives with her companion Roberto Torelli in Ronciglione, Viterbo.
Pirisi, ‘Pierina’ Pietrina (born 1950, Benutti, Sassari, Italy) migrated alongside an older brother and sister to Australia in 1970, where a relative had migrated sixty years earlier. In Australia, she joined the CPA. During a rally in Sydney against the war in Vietnam on New Years’ eve of 1972, she first encountered FILEF members. She joined FILEF and later the PCI. Her involvement in FILEF in Australia continued until 1984, when she returned to Italy along with her partner Edoardo Burani whom she married in 1985. Her political involvement continued in Italy, where she joined the *Rifondazione Comunista* in the 1990s. She currently works in the Records office of the Modena City Council23.

Riccio, Rita (born 1931, Campobasso, Italy) grew up in a working class family of communist background. In 1951, she received a Diploma in Accountancy and started work as a clerk and organiser in the PCI federation of Campobasso. In 1960, she moved to Rome with her husband, a socialist trade official of the CGIL. She worked in the trade office of the PCI publishing company, the *Editori Riuniti*, under the supervision of Antonino Salemi, father of Ignazio. In 1964, she found work with the organ of the PSIUP, *Mondo Nuovo*. With the merge of the PSIUP and the PCI in 1972, she joined Giuliano Pajetta and Dino Pelliccia at the newly established emigration office at the PCI headquarters. In 1990, she left the emigration office, which was dismantled during the transformation of the party from PCI to PDS. Since then, she has been working for FILEF central quarters. She currently lives in Rome24.

Salemi, Ignazio (born 1928, Rome, Italy; died 2004, Rome, Italy) joined the partisan movement in Tuscany in 1944 and participated in the Liberation War in Nazi-Fascist-occupied Northern Italy in January-May 1945. In the post-war period, he joined the PCI, of which he became a versatile and well-experienced official. He also became a correspondent of the PCI organ *L’Unità*. His activism was at times pugnacious and in 1948 he was arrested and jailed for forming a roadblock during the 1948 riots that followed the attempted assassination of PCI secretary Palmiro Togliatti. In the 1960s, Salemi became radio host for the PCI-sponsored Italian-language radio programs in Budapest and Prague. He spent four
years in Budapest, from approximately 1960 to 1964, before returning to Italy in 1964 or 1965. In 1966, he set out for Prague. During the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1969, he was directly involved in an episode that led to his second deportation, when he tried to save an anti-occupation demonstrator from an army squad by throwing a flowerpot. After his return to Italy, he worked for the emigration office of the PCI before becoming editor of FILEF organ *Emigrazione* in the early 1970s. In October-November 1973, he participated as the delegate FILEF Rome and editor of *Emigrazione* at the first Migrant Workers’ Conference in Melbourne and Sydney. Asked by FILEF members to co-ordinate the socio-political initiatives of the Australian/Melbourne wing of the organisation and to launch its organ *Nuovo Paese*, Salemi returned to Australia in March 1974. In 1976-77, he was at the centre of a contentious dispute over his amnesty application, which prompted a long, controversial political and legal case that culminated in his deportation in October 1977. After his return to Italy, Salemi worked as editor of *Emigrazione* until retirement in the 1980s. In 1981, his partner Cathy Angelone joined him in Rome. He died in Rome in 2004.

**Schiavoni, Franco** (born 1939, Calvello, Potenza, Italy) migrated to Australia with two of his sisters in 1957, joining his father who had migrated a few years earlier. Schiavoni completed his secondary schooling in a boarding school run by the Salesians in Italy. He later completed an Arts degree in Australia, alternating study and work. He later became teacher and academic lecturer. In 1971-72, he became involved in the ethnic rights’ movement with the FEC and later FILEF, and contributed to the ideological discourse on ethnic rights multiculturalism (*Brunswick City Council and Brunswick Oral History Project 1985: 64-69; Schiavoni 1975*). In the 1988, he was appointed Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission’s deputy chairman and in 1991 chairman, replacing George Papadopoulos. He died in the late 1990s.

**Sgrò, Anne, née Foster** (born 1943, Swan Hill, Victoria, Australia), grew up in country Victoria, primarily in Ballarat and Geelong. Her parents were of Scottish working-class
background and socialist tradition, and had migrated to Australia in the early 1920s. Anne’s father was a schoolteacher and an activist of the Victorian Teachers Union (VTU), who taught English to immigrants in West Geelong in the 1950s and early 60’s. In 1961, Anne enrolled by means of a teacher’s studentship in an Arts degree course at Melbourne University. In 1964, she met Giovanni Sgrò at meetings of the Eureka Youth League and the Unitarian Church in East Melbourne, where they both became involved in the Youth Peace Movement and later in the Anti-Vietnam War Campaign and the Vietnam War Moratorium Campaign. They married in 1965. In 1975, Anne became committed to FILEF when the FILEF Women’s Group (FWG) was formed in the wake of the International Women’s Year celebrations. In the FWG, she was particularly involved in the issue of childcare, an issue close to the heart of many female migrant workers. For years, she lobbied for the creation of a work-related childcare facility for workers in the North Coburg area. Eventually, a childcare complex opened in 1984 inside the precinct of the Commonwealth Clothing Factory, where most employees were migrant women. In the mid 1980s, Sgrò returned to full time teaching in secondary and primary state schools, where she was involved in curriculum writing, and played a major role in promoting and supporting the teaching of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and gender equity. She then became involved in the Union of Australian Women (UAW), of which she now is National Coordinator and President of the Victorian branch. She currently lives with her husband in North Coburg, Melbourne.

Sgrò, Giovanni (born 1931, Seminara, Reggio Calabria, Italy) migrated from countryside Calabria to Australia by means of assisted passage in February 1952. During his stay at the Bonegilla hostel camp in Northeast Victoria between April and July 1952, migrant-led protests broke out. He was one of the rebel delegates. He worked as a painter and farm labourer in country Victoria before moving to Melbourne in 1954, where he joined the Painters Union. Becoming more interested in politics, he joined the CPA. In 1958, when he was refused a re-entry visa due to his political militancy, the ALP Member for Wills, Gordon Bryant, took up his cause in Parliament. His acquaintance with Bryant influenced Sgrò’s decision to join the Coburg branch of the Labor Party. In the early 1960s, Sgrò became involved in the Youth Peace Movement, where he met Anne Foster, whom he married in
1965. Towards the end of the 1960s, Sgrò was involved in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement and his house became “a centre of activity”. He was also elected president of the Coburg branch of the Labor Party. In 1972, he began organising meetings in his house under the FILEF banner, mainly with Italians of communist and Labor creeds. In March 1973, after fifteen-years of refusal, he was eventually granted Australian citizenship at the Coburg Town Hall. The then Minister for Immigration Al Grassby and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gordon Bryant attended the ceremony. In September 1974, Sgrò and June Engish, principal of the Brunswick Girls High School, disrupted the opening of the Victorian Parliament, unfurling a banner to protest against the lack of facilities and funding to schools where the concentration of migrant students was high. Sgrò and Engish escaped arrest through the intervention of Labor MPs. Sgrò’s political career made a turning point in March 1977, when he was preselected for the safe seat of the Legislative Council province of North Melbourne, and in May 1979, when he was elected the first Italian-born ever member. On 18 July 1979, Sgrò made his maiden speech, which was partly presented in Italian; he controversially stressed that Australia was a multicultural nation. In March 1985, Sgrò was elected Deputy President of the Legislative Council and Chairman of Committees of the Legislative Council. In 1991, he failed to gain endorsement for the upcoming 1992 State election by the left wing of the Labor Party and lost the preselection bid. He continues his role as President of FILEF Melbourne (Sgrò 2002: passim). He currently lives with his wife Anne in North Coburg.

Notes to Biographical Index

3 Cathy Angelone, interviews with author, 5 and 13 April 2003, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
4 Edoardo Burani, interview with author, 26 March 2003, Modena, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
5 Joe Caputo, interview with author, 14 January 2003, Brunswick, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
6 Carlo Carli, interview with author, 27 February 2004, Coburg, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author); Carli’s biographical notes in http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ccarli/.
8 Alastair Davidson, interview with author, 16 December 2003, Hawthorn, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
10 Emilio Deleidi, interview with author, 23 May 2002, Fawkner, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
12 Levi’s biographical notes in http://www.penguin.co.uk.
13 Ibid. and http://www.italiabibli.net.
14 Franco Lugarini, interview with author, 9 April 2003, Cerveteri, Province of Roma, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
16 Vincenzo Mammoliti, interviews with author, 8 April and 16 May 2002, Bulla, Vic, Australia (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
18 The nuovo meridionalismo emerged in the late 1940s from the workers’ and peasants’ movement of the occupazione delle terre (Ciuffoletti and Degl’Innocenti 1978: 295-96). Unlike the previous movement of meridionalismo, which was an early cultural-political movement that had been lobbying for the problems of southern Italy since the unification of Italy, the nuovo meridionalismo was mainly comprised of working-class elements rather than of prominent intellectuals and politicians.
20 See Novelli’s biographical notes in http://www.diegonovelli.it.
22 Stefania Pieri, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
23 Pierina Pirisi, interview with author, 24 March 2003, Modena, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
24 Rita Riccio, interview with author, 8 April 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc and full transcription in possession of author).
APPENDIX 2 – CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS, 1943-1980

1943, April  
Italian anti-fascist organisation *Italia Libera* is founded.

1944  

1947  
The Italian-born population in Australia is 33,632.

1947, April 15  
*La Fiamma*, the biweekly founded by diocesan priest Giuseppe La Rosa, begins publication “to counteract the poisonous influence” of the radical *Il Risveglio* (Cresciani 1988b: 243).

1950  
*Italia Libera* is renamed *Club Italo-Australiano*, also called *Lega Italo-Australiana*.

1951, March  
Italy and Australia reach an agreement over assisted migration.

1951, September  
Referendum to ban the CPA in Australia is defeated.

1953  
The Australian Government issues a deportation order for Mario Abbiezzi, editor of *Il Risveglio* and secretary of the LIA in Sydney, due to his left-wing militancy and critique of the Italian emigration and Australian immigration policies. Demonstrations of support by the Australian Left and Trade Union Movement cause the withdrawal of the deportation order. Abbiezzi is denied Australian citizenship for years.

1955, March  
Split in the Victorian ALP. The ‘groupers’ form the Australian Labor Party (Anti Communist), later named the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

1956  

1957, January  
*Il Nuovo Risveglio* ceases publication.
1958, April  On a voluntarily basis, Emilio Deleidi begins assisting Italian workers on welfare and pension issues as representative of the Italian welfare agency INCA, affiliated with the trade union CGIL.

1958  Giovanni Sgrò, a painter who migrated from country Calabria in 1952 and joined the Painters Union and CPA in 1954, is denied a re-entry visa and afterward Australian citizenship.

1958, July  LIA is established in Melbourne.

1959, November 4  Il Globo begins publication in Melbourne under the editorship of Nino Randazzo.

1961  Vincenzo Mammoliti, CPA and LIA Melbourne member, is denied Australian citizenship. He will receive citizenship in 1977.

1963  The organ of the LIA Melbourne, Il Nuovo Paese, begins publication under the editorship of Emilio Deleidi.

1963  Il Globo editor and DLP candidate Nino Randazzo is defeated in an election bid for the Victorian state seat of Fitzroy.

1963, August  A split occurs in the CPA. Ted Hill, Victorian state secretary of the party establishes the pro-Chinese Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), the CPA (M-L).

1966  Il Nuovo Paese ceases publication in Melbourne and supposedly moves to Sydney under the editorship of Mario Abbiezzi.

1966  Giuseppe Di Salvo is defeated in a pre-selection bid for the Victorian state seat of Batman.

1967  The COASIT and the CIC are founded in Melbourne.

1967  Italian President Giuseppe Saragat visits to Australia.

1967  Legislation to reform the Italian consulates networks around the world is passed. It establishes consulate committees formed by local community representatives (later named COMITES). In Australia, it is first (partially) implemented in 1976.

1967, December 21  FILEF is founded in Rome. The independent left-wing senator Carlo Levi is elected FILEF’s president.
1971 Italian-born population in Australia is 289,476, making it the largest migrant group from a non-English speaking country.

1971, January Financed by the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, the FEC (to be renamed the CURA in 1975) opened in Fitzroy under the supervision of Brian Howe, later supported by Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer.

1971, Aug-Sep PCI official and L’Unità correspondent Diego Novelli visits Australia. PCI branches are set up in Sydney, Wollongong, and Melbourne.

1971, December A second split occurs in the CPA. The pro-Soviet splitters found the SPA.

1972 Emilio Deleidi is nominated national co-ordinator of INCA-CGIL in Australia; he will hold the position until 1987.

1972, March Constituent Congress of the IPCIF is held in Melbourne.

1972, July 6 FILEF is founded in Melbourne and Sydney. First informal meetings are held in North Coburg at the house of Giovanni Sgrò, activist of the local ALP branch since 1958. Sgrò is elected secretary of the Melbourne branch of FILEF.

1972, August Second Congress of the IPCIF is held in Melbourne.

1972, December 2 ALP wins federal elections, ending twenty-three years of consecutive conservative governments. Gough Whitlam is elected Prime Minister.

1973 Immigration Minister Al Grassby releases the document, A multicultural society for the future, marking the beginning of the multiculturalism era.

1973, March The FEC organises a series of seminars on migrant issues. FILEF activists take part.

1973, March 26 Giovanni Sgrò is granted Australian citizenship at the Coburg Town Hall. The Minister for Immigration Al Grassby and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gordon Bryant attend the ceremony and congratulate him personally.

1973, April-May Giuliano Pajetta, head of the PCI emigration’s office visits Australia.
1973, April 20-21 The Third IPCIF Congress is held in Sydney. The IPCIF’s executive committee is disassembled and the IPCIF is substituted with two comitati di sezione (branch committees), one in Melbourne and one in Sydney.

1973, September Industrial action takes place at the Ford Broadmeadows automobile plant. Migrant workers defy the request of trade union official to return to work. Workers clash with police inside the plant’s gates.

1973, October 5-7 First MWCs is held in Melbourne, and a month later in Sydney. Approximately four hundred delegates attend. Among the attendees, Ignazio Salemi editor of the Rome-based FILEF’s magazine Emigrazione and PCI official. Salemi remains in Australia until November.

1973, December 19 Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden announces his intention to introduce a scheme for the employment of welfare rights officers to assist disadvantaged ethnic groups. The scheme named Welfare Rights Officer Program is set to be launched the following year. Ten migrant-based organisations are to be recipients of the program funds. From the Italian ethnic groups, FILEF and COASIT are chosen.

1974, February The FEC receives a grant by the Ross Trust to conduct a study of Italians in the Coburg area. Part of grant is diverted to establish the first FILEF office in Melbourne, opening in Coburg, at 34-36 Munro Street.

1974, March Ignazio Salemi returns to Australia with the task to launch and edit the FILEF’s organ Nuovo Paese. He is also given the task to co-ordinate the FILEF’s activities.

1974, April The Italian Committee for the Federal ALP Government, which aims to support the federal re-election of the ALP is founded. Labor Minister for the ACT, Gordon Bryant is nominated co-ordinator of the activities of the committee.

1974, April 10 FILEF presents an ABC Access TV program on worker rights. Trade union official John Halfpenny and state MP Tom Roper participate.

1974, May 1 The FILEF bi-weekly organ Nuovo Paese is launched under the editorship of Joe Caputo. Bill O’Brien, Ted Forbes, Giovanni Sgrò, and Ignazio Salemi form the editorial staff.
1974, May-December  
In conjunction with the FEC, FILEF carries out a social survey among 400 hundred Italian families of the Coburg-Brunswick area.

1974, August 2  
The FILEF’s premises at 34-36 Munro Street, Coburg are opened officially with the presence of Gordon Bryant and local authorities. A few days later, Salemi returns to Italy for a short visit.

1974, September 10  
June Engish, principal of the Brunswick Girls High School and Giovanni Sgrò disrupt the opening of the Victorian Parliament unfurling a banner to protest against the lack of facilities in schools with a high percentage of migrant students. Engish and Sgrò escape arrest by intervention of Labor MPs.

1974, September 19  
FILEF is granted $10,000 by the Federal Government under the Welfare Rights Officer Program.

1974, September  
FILEF presents a second ABC Access TV program.

1974, October  
Along with a number of other migrant organisations, FILEF organises the Migrant Education Action Conference. With the intervention of Gordon Bryant, Salemi is granted a re-entry visa to Australia.

1974, November  
FILEF activist Cathy Angelone is employed as Welfare Rights Officer.

1974, December  
FILEF’s office moves to 18 Munro Street, Coburg.

1975  
FWG is founded.

1975, Feb 24-Mar 1  
World Conference on Italian Emigration is held in Rome. Eight of the twenty delegates representing the Italian-Australian community belong to FILEF. The findings of FILEF-FEC 1974 social survey are tabled.

1975, March  
*Giuseppe Di Vittorio* Cultural Club is founded in Thomastown, Melbourne.

1975, April 6  
A FILEF public assembly at the Coburg Town Hall is briefed on the World Conference on Italian Emigration held in Rome.

1975, April 26  
*The Age* publishes a front-page article titled ‘Italian communists move in’ by Vincent Basile. Sensationally, it
unveils the FILEF-PCI affiliation. The article raises concerns and anti-communist feelings in the community. The following day, Sgrò distributes thousands of leaflets denying the newspaper allegations.

1975, May 12
ABC Access Radio 3ZZ begins broadcasting programs in languages other than English. Ignazio Salemi and Umberto Martinengo fill the FILEF slot.

1975, May 14
The night of the 13th, there is an arson attempt on the FILEF’s office in Coburg. The blaze damages the editorial office of Nuovo Paese. The culprits are never found.

1975, July 30
Salemi fails to get an extension of his temporary residence permit and becomes a prohibited immigrant.

1975, August
First Festa de l’Unità is held in Australia in the Albion Hall, Brunswick.

1975, November 8
Second MWC is held in Melbourne, and is attended by approximately five hundred delegates.

1975, November 11
Gough Whitlam’s Labor Government is dismissed by the Governor-General Sir Jim Kerr. New elections are called for December 13.

1975, December 13
The Federal election is won by the Liberal-Country Party Coalition. Malcolm Fraser is elected Prime Minister. The only electoral seat in Australia where the ALP increases its votes is in the same constituency as the FILEF Melbourne main office.

1976, January 25
Immigration Minister Michael MacKellar announces a three-month amnesty for prohibited immigrants in Australia who overstayed their visas at 31 December 1975.

1976, March
Giuliano Pajetta visits Australia.

1976, March 25
FILEF branch of Campbellfield-Fawkner is founded. Emilio Deleidi is elected president.

1976, May
FILEF Executive Committee is elected. It consists of Umberto Frattali (president), Giovanni Sgrò (secretary), Cathy Angelone, Paola di Muro, Vincenzo Mammoliti, Assunto Colli, and Franco Ierinò (committee members).
1976, June

Petitions for signatures begin to circulate demanding Salemi be granted amnesty.

1976, July 13

Minister for Social Security Margaret Guilfoyle pays a visit to FILEF in Coburg and hands over a $5,000 grant cheque.

1976, July 24

FILEF moves to 2 Myrtle Street, Coburg.

1976, August

Public pressure mounts on the Australian Government to grant Salemi a permanent visa. FILEF releases a press statement inviting all the trade unions to join the struggle to keep Salemi in Australia.

1976, August 10

The Federal Opposition spokesman on Immigration, Ted Innes suggests legal action to enable Salemi to remain in Australia. The ACTU President Bob Hawke and the Opposition leader Gough Whitlam back the pro-Salemi campaign. FILEF launches a defence fund.

1976, August 13

Salemi takes out a High Court writ to challenge the constitutional validity of the refusal to grant amnesty to him. Peter Holding, president of the Victorian ALP, and Clyde Holding, Labor leader in the Victorian Parliament represents Salemi.

1976, August 15

FILEF organises a pro-Salemi public assembly at the Albion Hall. Peter Redlich, Gordon Bryant, and Murray Gavin, Mayor of Coburg attend.

1976, August 17

Ted Innes receives a petition of 7,000 signatures, which is than tabled in Parliament.

1976, August 17

FILEF is informed that its funding, under the Welfare Rights Officer Program, will be cut as of 1 January 1977, and will be re-allocated to the organisation Parents Without Partners.

1976, August 18

Concerned with being arrested and deported, Salemi goes into hiding. Public support for his struggle intensifies.

1976, August 26

At the first hearing of the High Court of Australia Justice Sir Harry Gibbs strikes out Salemi’s writ because he fails to establish a cause of action. In other words, Salemi is not entitled to an injunction to prevent his deportation. Ted Innes receives a second petition of 1,119 signatures.
1976, September  Umberto Martinengo is appointed senior editor of *Nuovo Paese* and Joe Caputo managing editor.

1976, October 21  The full bench of the High Court of Australia issues an order allowing Salemi to stay in Australia until further proceeding before the court are completed.

1977  Melbourne INCA office is moved to the NOW Centre in Coburg.

1977, February  With a grant-in-aid by the Fitzroy City Council of $3,000, FILEF opens a welfare office at the Social Planning Office in Fitzroy.

1977, February  INCA opens an office in the Italo-Australian Club, Canberra. Five INCA offices are now set up in Australia, Melbourne, Sydney, Wollongong, Canberra and Adelaide.

1977, March  FILEF secretary Giovanni Sgrò wins a preselection bid for the safe seat of the Legislative Council province of Melbourne North.

1977, May  The pro-Salemi petitions result in the collection of 14,000 signatures. CAPD is founded in Sydney.

1977, May  As a FILEF delegate, Cathy Angelone attends a conference on women’s rights in Manila, Philippines.

1977, May 11  The full bench of the High Court of Australia rejects Salemi’s appeal to challenge the Immigration Minister’s right to deport him. In a split decision, the casting vote of the Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick goes against Salemi. The Minister is thus no longer obliged to abide by the principles of natural justice in deportation decisions. Salemi’s legal team ponders whether to appeal to the Privy Council. Salemi goes into hiding.

1977, May 29  The Second Migrant Education Conference is held at the Brunswick Town Hall.

1977, June 17  The Federal Ombudsman J.E. Richardson is asked to investigate charges that the Immigration Department supplied false information to its Minister on the Salemi case.

1977, August 24  The Federal Ombudsman concludes his report on the Salemi case and underlines that Immigration Department officials failed to properly advise their Minister. However, the report
has no legal implication and MacKellar decides Salemi should leave Australia.

1977, September 2 An appeal to the Federal Government to allow Salemi to stay in Australia is rejected and a deportation order for Salemi is issued. The Australian Federal Police start searching for him.

1977, October 4 The Italian Trade Union Federation (CGIL-CISL-UIL) demands the Salemi’s deportation order be revoked.

1977, October 7-9 The First FILEF National Congress is held in Melbourne.

1977, October 18 MacKellar refuses to say whether the Italian Government asked the Australian government to withdraw the deportation order against Salemi.

1977, October 19 At roughly 10.30 am, Ignazio Salemi is arrested whilst driving down Bell street, Preston. After questioning, he is escorted to Tullamarine airport and boarded on a Qantas flight to London. Salemi’s sudden deportation takes the transportation unions by surprise, which had pledged to prevent the forced departure of Salemi.

1977, November Martinengo is appointed the editor of *Nuovo Paese* and Caputo, the co-editor.

1977, November 20 On the occasion of the federal elections of 10 December, more than a thousand pro-Whitlam Italian migrants rally in front of the Fitzroy Town Hall. The rally is organised by the Amici Italo-australiani dell’ALP.

1977, December FILEF activists campaign in several Melbourne factories for the election of the ALP.


1978, March Lino Bellini of FILEF Roma visits Australia.

1978, June Pajetta visits Australia.

1978, June 28 The First Press and Propaganda Conference of the PCI is held in Australia.

1978, July Stefano de Pieri is appointed as the new editor of *Nuovo Paese*. 
1978, July  Michele Parisi of FILEF Switzerland holds a conference on Italian politics, historic compromise, trade unions and terrorism in the Italian Department of La Trobe University. A similar conference will be held in Italian Department of the University of Melbourne.

1978, August  Three hundred attend the ALP Festival at the Albion Hall. Among the attendees are Franck Wilkes, Labor opposition leader in Victoria and shadow Minister in Ethnic Affairs, Gordon Bryant, Jack Walton, ALP leader in the Victorian Legislative Council, and Jim Simmonds, shadow Industry Minister.

1978, October 1  *Festa de L’Unità* is held at the Italia Hall of Northcote, Melbourne.

1978  The Galbally Report is released.

1979, February 25  The First Congress of the Australian PCI Federation is held in Melbourne.

1979, May  Giovanni Sgrò becomes the first Italian-born elected to the Victorian Legislative Council.

1979, May  The FWG participates in the Women and Labour Conference held in Melbourne.

1979, June 25  Joe Caputo and Stefano de Pieri present a report on migrant unemployment as part of the series of lectures *Project Unemployment* at Monash University.

1979, July 18  MLC Giovanni Sgrò make his maiden Parliamentary speech partly in Italian.

1979, August  Pajetta visits Australia.

1979, November  *Feste de L’Unità* is held in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide.

1979  The Valmorbida family, proprietor of *Il Globo*, takes over *La Fiamma*.

1980  *Festa de l’Unità* is held in Coburg.

1980, June  Joe Caputo is nominated *consultore all’estero* (overseas advisor) for the Apulia Regional Government.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980, August 30</td>
<td>The Australian PCI Federation organises the <em>Festa Popolare</em> at the Albion Hall. Bianca Bracci-Torsi of the National Central Committee of the PCI Rome is invited as a guest speaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980, September 28</td>
<td>The Second FILEF National Congress is held at the Princess Hill High School Hall, Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
APPENDIX 3 – FIGURES

Figure 1 – FILEF Office, 2 Myrtle Street, Coburg, Vic, undated. Courtesy of Roberto Malara

Figure 2 – FILEF Office, 2 Myrtle Street, Coburg, Vic, undated. From left: Renato Licata, Carlo Scalvini, Stefania Pieri, Stefano de Pieri. Courtesy of Roberto Malara
Figure 3 – Melbourne, May Day 1975. FILEF group, central banner-bearers Giovanni Sgrò (L) and Umberto Frattali (R). Courtesy of Umberto Frattali

Figure 4 – Melbourne, City Square, 12 November 1975. FILEF protesters Joe Caputo (L) and Umberto Martinengo (R). Courtesy of Umberto Martinengo
Figure 5 – Melbourne, May Day 1978. FILEF group. Courtesy of Umberto Martinengo

Figure 6 – Melbourne, May Day 1978. FILEF activists (front) Cathy Angelone (L) and Umberto Martinengo (R). Courtesy of Cathy Angelone
Figure 7 – Melbourne, May Day 1978. FILEF activists (central) Carlo Scalvini (L) and Umberto Martinengo (R). Courtesy of Umberto Martinengo

Figure 8 – First FILEF National Congress, 7-8 October 1977, Melbourne. From left: Enzo Soderini, unknown, Pierina Pirisi, Umberto Martinengo, Giovanni Sgrò, and Umberto Frattali. Courtesy of Umberto Martinengo
Figure 9– Front page of The Age, 26 April 1975
Figure 10 – Cartoon from *Il Corriere di Sette giorni*, 9 May 1975.

Figure 11 - Cartoon from *The Bulletin*, 4 June 1977.
Figure 12 – Australian PCI Federation founding Congress, Albion Hall, Brunswick, Vic, 25 February 1979. *Courtesy of Franco Lugarini*

Figure 13 – Australian PCI Federation founding Congress, Albion Hall, Brunswick, Vic, 25 February 1979. *Courtesy of Franco Lugarini*
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Busta 4121, fogli 725, 731-34 (microfilm 65), 937-46 (microfilm 64)
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A434, 3021785
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