

THE ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN FORT WILLIAM'S EAST  
END IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

By the turn of the twentieth century in the midst of almost every significant urban centre of Canada and the United States, there existed a so-called "Little Italy" or "Italian Colony". These were sections of cities or towns where the recent Italian immigrants lived in overcrowded dwellings. The purpose of this study of Fort William's "Little Italy" is to present an analysis of the experience of Italian immigrants within the context of this particular Canadian setting from the beginning of the twentieth century to the Second World War.

The subjects who made up the phenomenal current of emigration from the Italian peninsula did not represent a cross-section of society. They were overwhelmingly contadini (peasants) and artisans from rural Italy. A burgeoning North American industrial capitalism was the magnet that drew the contadini to the New World, and upon their arrival they joined the ranks of the proletariat. Thus, an analysis of how they functioned in their new occupational role and inevitably how they influenced the course of industrial relations at Fort William is one of the major areas of concern of this study. Contadini were generally perceived by Canadians as being docile people who readily accepted very low wages and in doing so lowered the standard of living of the native working class. This local study will demonstrate

that this perception was only partially true and that the contadini formed the vanguard in several significant labour struggles in the pre-World War One era. Equally important in this regard is to consider how the contadini's militant reaction toward industrial capitalism influenced their status within the community.

For the Italian immigrants, the transition from their agrarian world to an urban, industrial North American environment was a particularly complex process. Almost overnight the contadino immigrant was faced with having to learn to work and live in a milieu radically different from his pre-industrial background. One of the stumbling blocks in his path of adjustment was his general inability to master the English language of the host society. This handicap was aggravated by the generally hostile reception accorded to the contadini in their new communities where they were considered "undesirable foreigners". For these reasons Fort William's "Little Italy" came to encompass the residential but even more importantly the social perimeters of the Italian immigrants. What was life like in a "Little Italy" in Canada? The aim of this study will be to provide some answers to this question.

One of the most popular cultural resources which emerged in most of the "Italian colonies" in the adjustment phase of immigration was the mutual aid or benevolent society. So far little historical probing has been done into

this immigrant North American institution as historians have tended to view such societies with considerable suspicion because of the aura of ritual and secrecy that has surrounded them and the inability of most historians to cope with the foreign language in question. A detailed case study of such a benevolent society, Società Italiana Di Benevolenza -- Principe Di Piemonte from its inception in Fort William in 1909 and throughout the period under consideration will form another important aspect of this thesis. This case study reveals that collective action was a necessary vehicle for the establishment of a coherent social life within Fort William's "Little Italy". The benevolent society became a pivotal secular moral force and thus an informal agent of social control. It was at this collective level that the contadini articulated the theoretical framework that regulated their lives in the adjustment phase of immigration.

Because the Italian immigrants usually intended to make their journey a temporary affair and because they were received in North America as "undesirable foreigners", the model of adjustment had to take into account this double-edged dilemma. The model which the founders of the Principe Di Piemonte articulated did reconcile these two factors. Individuals were called upon to live their lives in Canada with the view of doing honour to the Patria (motherland), for in doing so they would become better accepted by the host country. In practical terms this meant that the contadini were to display respectable behaviour and cultivate

mutual material and moral assistance amongst themselves. This simple and practical approach promoted stability in the social life of Fort William's "Little Italy", as the contadini retained their Italian connection and thus their identity while at the same time striving to become "respectable" members in their new community.

## PREFACE

The emergence of Fort William's "Little Italy" at the turn of the twentieth century, along with its counterparts throughout the urban centres of North America was the result of a very complex social phenomenon which began to unfold in rural Italy in the late 1880's when Italian mass emigration started in earnest. Until the outbreak of the First World War emigration from the Italian peninsula grew remarkably, justifying Robert F. Foerster's assertion in 1919 that "emigration from Italy belongs among the extraordinary movements of mankind", both because of its intensity over an extended period of time and for the impact that it had in receiving countries.<sup>1</sup> From a statistical point of view Foerster's statement is readily appreciated. The total gross emigration from Italy to both European countries and transoceanic destinations during the period 1876 to 1899 was over five and one half million; from 1900 to 1915 when the movement was most intensive over nine million persons emigrated; and between 1919 to 1930 the total surpassed

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<sup>1</sup>Robert F. Foerster, The Italian Emigration of Our Times (Harvard Economic Studies, XX, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 3. This work is still considered a North American classic in the field. It is a particularly valuable source for the wealth of information it provides on the circumstances which provoked the large-scale Italian emigration.

three million.<sup>2</sup>

Initially when I first set out on the undertaking of compiling a local ethnic history my plans were to devote a few pages to the causes which triggered Italian emigration. Then, in view of the staggering scope of the contadini's exodus from rural Italy, I soon realized that a more substantial examination of this massive movement would be essential in order to study Fort William's "Little Italy" in its context. While "Little Italy" of Fort William is the focus of this study, inevitably references will be made to the "Italian Colony" of the nearby community of Port Arthur when events occurring there involved Italians from Fort William or when such events had repercussions for the Italians of the Twin Cities in general.<sup>3</sup>

Because an attempt in 1911 to establish an Italian language newspaper in Fort William's "Little Italy" was aborted, the everyday concerns of the contadini went largely unrecorded. The local press and other Anglo-Canadian observers recorded for the most part the more sensational

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<sup>2</sup>Appendix A. These figures do not make allowances for immigrants who returned and then re-emigrated.

<sup>3</sup>Fort William became incorporated as a town in 1892 and in 1907 as a city. Port Arthur, situated about four miles to the east attained city status in 1907. Eventually the two communities became known as the "Twin Cities". In 1970 the two cities were amalgamated and given the new name of "Thunder Bay". Thunder Bay is also the name of the district in which the communities are located.

happenings which occurred from time to time, such as the exploits of the "Black Handers" and the violent labour strikes in which the Italians were at the forefront. Only the sketchy Minutes of the Italian Benevolent Society, Principe Di Piemonte, which was established in 1909, offered the possibility of capturing a glimpse of the everyday aspirations and problems that the immigrants experienced over an extended period of time. The other major source used in this study was interviews with early Italian immigrants and their children who lived through the period of history under consideration. I am very much indebted to the many individuals who enthusiastically invited me to interview them at length in their homes. Although in the actual writing of the thesis I only used a minute fraction of the abundance of information which they provided, it was through their contributions that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of immigrant life.

This study could not have been brought to completion without the assistance of many persons. Various people made available to me documents in their possession and gladly shared their knowledge with me. Because it has not been possible to express my gratitude to them all in this text individually, I, therefore, express my thanks to them collectively. Particular mention, however, should be given to Mr. Oliver Facca, President of the Società Italiana Di Benevolenza: Principe Di Piemonte who kindly made available

to me the records of the Society which proved to be invaluable, to Ms. Julia Marchiori who acquainted me with many aspects of Fort William's "Little Italy".

I would like to thank the Library staff of Lakehead University and in particular Ms. Virginia Taylor, Inter-Library Loan Librarian, and Ms. Vivian Nyssonen, Documents Librarian for their courteous and most efficient service. Also my gratitude to the offices of Dr. Giovanni Cerruti, Consolato Generale d'Italia in Toronto, and the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Servizio Storico E Documentazione in Rome who responded to my queries and graciously sent me the information I sought. My sincere thanks go to my good friend and colleague Beth Redfern for her encouragement and for her map-making and to Mrs. Patricia Bishop for a most professional typing job. Also thanks to my good friends and colleagues Mr. Frank Barca and Mr. Georgio Fazio who enthusiastically discussed Italian emigration on numerous social occasions that I could not resist the temptation to raise the topic.

From my teachers at Lakehead University I acquired scholarly advice and a deepened appreciation of history. My greatest debt of gratitude is to Dr. J. D. Wilson, my adviser, who throughout the course of the composition of this dissertation offered much guidance and encouragement. His deep interest in Canadian social history has served as an

inspiration for my work. Errors that remain of a factual or interpretative nature are my sole responsibility.

To my parents who made it possible for me to continue with my studies, I offer my deepest thanks.

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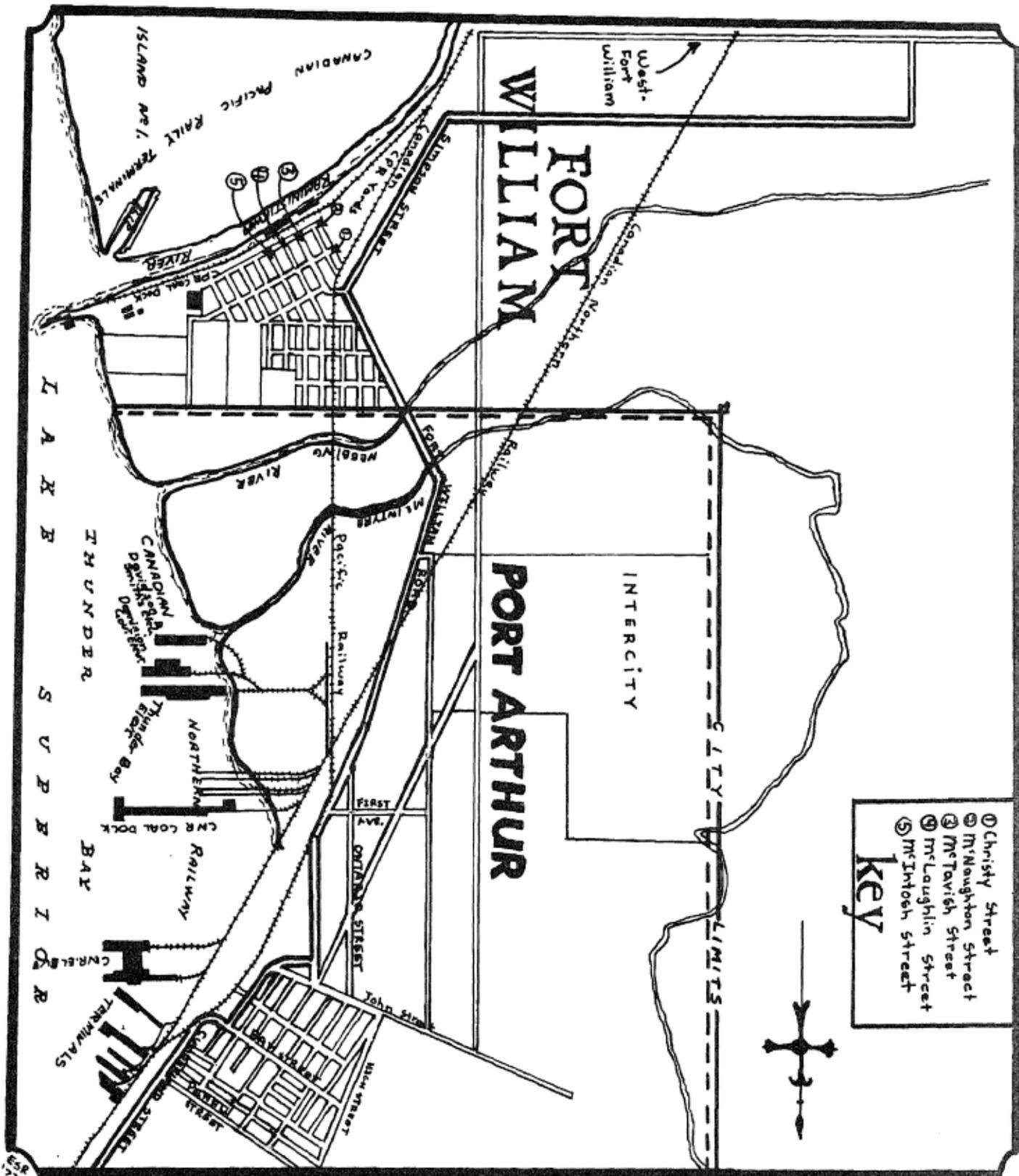
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The **TWIN CITIES** C 1914



adapted from

G.R. Duncan, *Where Two Cities Link; and the Story of a Great Industrial Development* (Fort William, Ontario, 1914).

## CHAPTER I

### EXODUS OF THE CONTADINI

#### 1. Character of Italian Emigration

Paradoxically, large-scale emigration from the Italian peninsula in the nineteenth century occurred in the years following the political unification of the country in 1870. In the pre-unification era, the authorities of the various States feared the consequences of emigration and had generally discouraged it. Nevertheless, limited migration patterns developed regardless of the official obstacles that were placed in its way.<sup>1</sup> Within the peninsula, agricultural workers crossed various provincial borders in pursuit of temporary employment that became available during seasonal peaks of agricultural activity such as harvesting of rice in Lombardy. Men from Calabria were accustomed to travel to Sicily to work as seasonal agricultural labourers. An annual temporary migration had also developed between Umbria and Marches. It is estimated, for instance, that in 1900 as many as one million workers spent at least two months of

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<sup>1</sup> Francesco Saverio, Nitti, Scritti Sulla Questione Meredionale. Vol. I: Saggi Sulla Storia Del Mezzogiorno--Emigrazione E Lavoro (1888-1909), Bari: Editori Laterza, 1958), p. 317.

each year working in other parts of Italy away from their homes.<sup>2</sup>

This movement of labour within the peninsula never solved the structural imbalances, but it surely accustomed the inhabitants of the participating districts to accept the notion of going elsewhere, at least temporarily, when conditions became too difficult at home. Migration, as a social phenomenon, had become accepted and entrenched in the ethos of the people. The nineteenth century would-be migrant could find a rationalization for leaving his community in an old Italian proverb which expressed both a degree of pessimism and of optimism, "you will find the same village the world over."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the migration within the peninsula, a migratory current had also developed toward Continental Europe. Italians particularly from Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto had found their way to France, Switzerland and Austria. The greatest concentration of Italians outside the peninsula was in France where it is estimated there were seventy six thousand persons in 1861.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Grazia Dore, "Some Social and Historical Aspects of Italian Emigration to America", Journal of Social History, II (1968), p. 111; Denis Mack Smith, Italy--A Modern History (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 239.

<sup>3</sup>Dore, op cit., p. 106.

<sup>4</sup>Alvo Fontani, Gli Emigrati (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1962), p. 11.

Relatively speaking the people of the Italian peninsula had remained aloof from the huge European migratory movement to North America which had begun with the closing of the Napoleonic Wars. The major protagonists of this movement originated from northern and western Europe and included Irish, English, Germans, Dutch and Scandinavians. For instance, in the period 1820 to 1860, more than five million immigrants arrived in the United States and only 13,709 of these people had come from the Italian peninsula.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Canada in 1871 there were only 218 persons whose birthplace was Italy and a total of 1,035 persons who claimed Italian racial origin out of a total population of 3,485,761.<sup>6</sup>

Transoceanic migration from the peninsula began in earnest only after 1850 and in its early stages it involved primarily people from Liguria whose destinations were usually Latin American countries, particularly Argentina, and to a lesser degree to North America. The Ligurians, the first emigrants from the peninsula to journey to the New World, had crossed the Atlantic prior to the advent of the steamships that were later to render the crossing a less difficult task

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<sup>5</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>Canada. Bureau of Statistics, The Canada Year Book 1905 (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, Printer To The King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1906), pp. 2-3.

and, also equally important, less costly.<sup>7</sup> These Ligurian immigrants had been motivated by commercial interests and also by a sense of adventure.<sup>8</sup>

Among the early emigrants from the peninsula to North America were pathetic children engaged in the "wandering professions". Extreme poverty in the regions of Liguria, Basilicata (known also as Lucania) and Campania had compelled parents to indenture some of their children to speculators who took them to foreign countries where they worked as street musicians, chimney sweepers and even as beggars. Early in the nineteenth century many men from the northern part of the peninsula, caught in dire poverty, turned to organ-grinding, an art that took little training or talent, as a full-time occupation. As they travelled through the streets of major European cities grinding music, they employed young children who sang, danced or played the tambourines. The role of the children had little to do with improving the quality of the music but rather their latent function was primarily to arouse pity in the audiences who in turn would respond more generously with the coin donations that the grinder could then pocket. The exploitation of

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<sup>7</sup>Sailing vessels disappeared from the North Atlantic emigrant trade between 1865 and 1870. Philip Taylor, The Distant Magnet--European Emigration To The U.S.A. (London: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 131.

<sup>8</sup>Fontani, op. cit., p. 11; Anna Maria Martellone, Una Little Italy Nell'Atene D'America--La comunita italiana di Boston dal 1880 al 1920 (Napoli: Guida Editori), p. 45.

children in this manner became an inherent aspect of the enterprise. In some cases the grinders would employ their own children but in many cases they procured their assistants on an apprentice contract from parents who had difficulty feeding their children.

By the middle of the nineteenth century a substantial child trade had developed. Speculators were now going into the poverty-ridden areas of Campania and Basilicata recruiting the little musicians that would provide entertainment in the streets of New York and of other major cities of the United States. The transaction between the speculator and the parents ordinarily involved a written contract. Generally these agreements provided that the speculators took charge of the children for a period of three years.

Initially the entrepreneur gave a certain amount of money to the mother and agreed to send the father additional monthly installments. While the children remained in his charge he was responsible to provide for their needs. After three years, he was obliged to return the children to their home with new suits and musical instruments. In return the padrone (master) would take all the money that the children earned in the streets, and in case a child tried to withhold some of the earnings, the contract stipulated that the padrone could deduct ten times as much from the agreed monthly installments that he was to send to the family of the child.

Poverty-stricken parents accepted such contracts since

they were convinced that these speculators would be able to better provide for the needs of their children and at the same time the promised monthly remittances would be of much help to the rest of the family. Often, however, once across the ocean the speculators mistreated the children and could find plenty of excuses not to send the monthly sums to the family or even fail to return the children at the end of the three years.

Many speculators discovered that it was more profitable to sell the children to other padroni rather than to work with the children themselves. In New York little Italian boys sold from \$100 to \$300 while a little girl would sell for as much as \$500, particularly if she were attractive. In the early seventies the American press bitterly attacked this practice of child trade and labelled it "Italian white child slavery". It is estimated that at this time there were a total of 1,500 organ-grinder children in New York City and 7,000 throughout the nation.

In part influenced by the American press the Italian Government passed a law in 1873 that prohibited the practice of engaging children under the age of eighteen in the wandering professions. Unfortunately this law did not eradicate the extreme poverty that had caused the development of the "white child slavery." As the child trade came to a close, the adult population of Basilicata and Campania

increasingly started their trek to the New World.

The phenomenon of the organ-grinders and the street musicians proved to be a long term liability for the waves of future Italian emigrants. In the eyes of "respectable" men in the United States the organ-grinders represented a lazy and ignorant element. Many Americans would hence apply the same assessment of inferiority to future Italian immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

Until the end of the nineteenth century the thrust of Italian trans-Atlantic emigration continued to be directed toward South America. This pattern was also reflected in the number of Italian immigrants who returned home each year. Until 1901 the greater number came from South America, but during the period 1902 to 1914 the repatriation movement from the Americas was dominated by Italians returning home from the United States.<sup>10</sup>

At least two factors were responsible from the outset for causing Italian emigration to be focused until the beginning of the twentieth century on South America and to a much lesser degree toward North America. Firstly, the various promoters of emigration to North America had not been soliciting potential emigrants in Italy. For instance,

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<sup>9</sup>Robert H. Bremner, "Children With the Organ Man", American Quarterly, VIII (Fall, 1956), pp. 277-282; Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 374-375.

<sup>10</sup>Foerster, op. cit., p. 30.

as late as 1883 the Northern Pacific Railway had only one hundred and twenty-four recruiting agents on the European continent, while eight hundred and thirty-one operated in the British Isles.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the Italians favoured following the footsteps of their predecessors and travelled to South America where relatives and friends provided a strong psychological attraction. During the 1880's many Italian emigrants, though with great reluctance, purchased fares to the United States for the simple reason that they were cheaper than fares to South America. Many of these emigrants who were interviewed by Nitti, stated before their departure that their ultimate destination would still be South America. They intended to work in the United States for a while to earn some money to allow them to finance the rest of the trip to join their friends in Latin America. The reluctance of these emigrants to consider North America as an attractive destination was articulated by Nitti who himself was convinced that Italian emigration to the United States was destined to meet a variety of insurmountable problems. He writes that the emigrants were conscious that in North America there was no proximity of language, race or traditions. Italians, he predicted, would face considerable economic competition with

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Meier Schlesinger, The Rise of The City 1879-1898 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 28.

the established and numerically superior Irish and German communities.<sup>12</sup>

Having landed in the United States, many of the Italian immigrants whose original intention had been South America and who were now attracted by higher wages, stopped short on their trek and remained in North America.<sup>13</sup> In addition many groups of Italian immigrants from major cities in the United States, such as New York and Chicago, would soon emigrate once more in search of temporary work in Canada and particularly in railway construction. As early as 1883 Italian immigrants from New York were part of an unlucky foray of three thousand labourers that arrived at a work site of the Canadian Pacific Railway on the north shore of Lake Superior.<sup>14</sup> Chicago, for instance, in its generally recognized role as a labour

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<sup>12</sup>Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 324-327, Nitti also credited the internal political conflicts in Paraguay and the wars between Paraguay and Uruguay and between Chile and Peru for contributing to a noticeable increase of Italian emigration to North America in the 1880's.

<sup>13</sup>Humbert S. Nelli, Italians In Chicago 1880-1930-- A Study In Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Arriving in December, 1883, the men found no work available because of the lateness of the season. The agents from the labour bureaus in New York who had accompanied the workers promptly left the scene, leaving behind the men who had no means to return to New York. Charlotte Erickson, American Industry and the European Immigrant 1860-1885 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 103-104.

recruiting centre, continued to provide many of the Italian immigrants employed by the Canadian railroads even as late as the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> These reluctant emigrants of the 1880's initiated the change of focus of Italian emigration from a predominantly South American one to a North American one.

The decade of the 1880's also witnessed another shift in Italian emigration. Slowly the source of the main flow of the emigration current had shifted from Northern Italy to Southern Italy. Prior to 1887 two-thirds of Italian migrants came from the North. Veneto had been the leading region of emigration. In the South, emigration had been known in a few localities of Basilicata and Calabria and had developed into a significant phenomenon only after 1867 when it is said to have functioned as a real substitute for the brigantagio (brigandage).<sup>16</sup>

Between 1860-1865 dire economic conditions in the rural areas of the peninsula gave rise to widespread brigantagio. Men unable to meet their financial obligations or simply fed up with the oppressive semi-feudal order went into hiding in the mountains where they formed bands and engaged in the extortion of money from the wealthy. These outlaws generally

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<sup>15</sup>Rudolph John Vecoli, "Chicago's Italians Prior to World War I: A Study of Their Social and Economic Adjustment" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1962), p. 284.

<sup>16</sup>Fernando Manzotli, La Polemica Sull' Emigrazione Nell' Italia Unita (2nd ed.; Milano: Albrighi, Segati & C., 1969), pp. 14-15.

won the respect of the rural poor since they often shared their loot with the latter. The authorities initiated steps in 1861 to deal with the briganti; however, their efforts were not successful in destroying the various bands. Brigantaggio declined only once emigration intensified in this area after 1865.<sup>17</sup>

In the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy), emigration was slower to develop than in the North, partially because of the greater deficiency in the means of communication in the area, but more so because economic and social relations were still being determined by lingering elements of a feudal order.

Restrictions on personal freedom inherent in feudalism made it difficult for the individual to try to improve his economic position by migration. By contrast, in the North, even prior to the unification of the country, an industrial base had developed and feudal remnants in the rural areas existed to a much lesser degree than in the South. Here agriculture was already considerably developed along capitalistic or commercial lines.<sup>18</sup> Under the economic structure of the North, the individual's ability to migrate was greater since he was not bound to the soil by semi-feudal contracts. This was in contrast to the South where a good

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<sup>17</sup>Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 317; Christopher Seton-Watson, Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925 (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd., 1967), p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>Emilio Sereni, Il Capitalismo Nelle Campagne (1860-1900) (2nd ed.: Torino: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 1968), p. 37.

deal of the landholdings were based on semi-feudal arrangements. Furthermore, landholding contracts had remained untouched by the process of political unification since the old ruling classes were allowed by the new central government to maintain their privileged position.<sup>19</sup> In these provinces of the Mezzogiorno, feudalism had only been abolished at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the area was invaded by the Napoleonic armies. Theoretically the Laws of August 2, 1806 had legislated away the feudal order, but in reality even as late as one hundred years later in certain parts of the South, feudal traditions had remained strong both in spirit and in practice.<sup>20</sup>

Italian large-scale emigration was dominated by two characteristics; it was overwhelmingly male, and temporary. The manifestations of this model had emerged as early as the Italian census of 1871 when emigration was in its infant stage. An analysis of the census data pointed to a major prevalence of adult male emigrants over the opposite sex. With few exceptions wives and children did not accompany adult males to the various destinations in the European continent nor to the Americas. This demographic aspect of the migration suggested that the emigrants did not consider their departure

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<sup>19</sup>Fontani, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup>Nitti, "Inchiesta Sulle Condizioni Dei Contadini In Basilicata E In Calabria (1910)", op. cit., IV, pp. 35, 111.

to be permanent in nature but rather their aim was to seek work in other countries where remuneration for their labour was higher. Their return home was planned once a certain amount of money had been saved.<sup>21</sup> Table I based on data gathered by Coletti in 1911 for the period 1876 to 1910 shows the extent to which Italian emigration remained overwhelmingly dominated by adult males who left without any other member of the family.

Within the context of adult male migration some regional differences existed particularly between the North and the South. Emigrants from the former tended more to take their entire family with them while in the case of the emigrants from the Mezzogiorno, even if they were contemplating leaving Italy to farsi americani (to become Americans, as they used to say), the males would first leave on their own and would send for the rest of the family sometime later.<sup>22</sup> At times couples would cross the ocean, but this did not necessarily imply that they were leaving with intentions of becoming americani. For instance Giuseppe Giacosa, an Italian artist, who travelled to America in the 1880's, and wrote a narrative of his impressions of his fellow travellers, described three women accompanied by their husbands. These three couples,

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<sup>21</sup> Francesco Coletti, "Dell' emigrazione italiana," Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Cinquant' anni di storia italiana, III, (Milano, 1911), p. 26; Manzotti, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 334, 362.

TABLE I

ITALIAN EMIGRANTS FROM 1876 TO 1910, BY SEX,  
AGE AND WHETHER EMIGRATED ALONE OR ACCOMPANIED  
BY OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS<sup>a</sup>

(per 100 emigrants)

Year(s)	Males	Females	Minors Under 15 Years of Age	Departing Emigrants Without Other Family Members	Departing Emigrants With Other Family Members
1876-78	86.41	13.59	9.21	76.59	23.41
1884-86	82.63	17.37	10.78	69.24	30.76
1894-96	77.17	22.83	16.18	59.32	40.77
1904-06	82.30	17.70	10.59	79.67	20.33
1907	81.52	18.48	10.25	80.93	19.07
1908	82.71	17.29	9.96	81.34	18.66
1909	81.16	18.84	10.29	79.03	20.97
1910	81.50	18.50	10.60	78.70	21.80

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Coletti, op. cit., p. 49.

Giacosa learned, had left their children in Italy with their grandparents as the couples were eager to work in America for a few years and then return back home.<sup>23</sup>

Until 1886, as statistics show in Table II, the regions of the greatest density of migration were in the North. During the period 1876 to 1886, Veneto had the highest migration intensity with an annual average 134 emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants, followed by Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy with an annual average of 96, 59, and 53 respectively. In the South, Basilicata and Calabria were the two leading regions with an annual average of 108 and 44 emigrants per 10,000 respectively. Increased participation from regions in the South during the period 1887-1900 gave rise to what has been referred to as the "flood" of Italian immigrants.<sup>24</sup> During this period the statistics suggest that emigration from the North generally levelled off, but shows a sharp rise in emigration from Veneto which still had the highest annual average of 324 emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants while some decreases occurred in Piedmont and Liguria. Basilicata and Calabria both experienced marked increases in emigration and were the second and third highest regions of emigration after Veneto with 184 and 115 emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants respectively. The Table also shows that the regions of

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<sup>23</sup>Giuseppe Giacosa, Impressioni D'America (Milano: Tipografia Editrice, L. F. Cogliati, 1898), pp. 161-164.

<sup>24</sup>Nelli, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

TABLE II<sup>a</sup>

## ITALIAN EMIGRATION BY REGION

1876 - 1909

(annual average of emigrants per  
10,000 inhabitants)

Region	1876-1886	1887-1900	1901-1909
<u>North</u>			
Piedmont	96	85	162
Liguria	59	43	60
Lombardy	53	53	113
Veneto	134	324	298
<u>Centre</u>			
Emilia	23	50	133
Tuscany	40	57	117
Marches	10	42	204
Umbria	0.5	10	144
Latium	0.5	10	98
<u>South</u>			
Abruzzi-Molise	31	102	337
Campania	34	96	222
Apulia	3.9	17	104
Basilicata (Lucania)	108	184	305
Calabria	44	115	308
<u>Insular</u>			
Sicily	7	44	210
Sardinia	1.5	7	62
Entire Italy	47	87	179

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Coletti, op. cit., p. 40.

Abruzzi Molise and Campania drastically increased their emigration from a mere 31 and 34 emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants respectively during the previous period to 102 and 96 emigrants.

It is largely due to the increased migration of the southern Italians starting with 1887 that the annual average of the emigrants from the whole of Italy rises from 47 emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants in the period of 1876 to 1886, to 87 emigrants in the period 1887 to 1900, and an astonishing annual average of 179 during the period 1901 to 1909. It was this substantial migration from the Meridione (South) that was decisive in turning the focus of Italian transatlantic emigration from South to North America. During the last decade of the nineteenth century more Italians went to the United States than any other country except Brazil.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1887 is also a turning point for the history of Italian emigration. Transoceanic emigration, which by now was mainly directed to the Americas, started to prevail over emigration to European countries and to those of the Mediterranean basin.<sup>26</sup> A decade earlier in 1876 only 19,848 travelled to transoceanic destinations out of a total of

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<sup>25</sup>Italy. Istituto Centrale Di Statistica, Sommario di Statistiche Storiche Italiane 1861-1955 (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1958), p. 66.

<sup>26</sup>Specific figures for Italian emigration to transoceanic destinations and to European countries and the Mediterranean basin from 1876 to 1941 are provided in Appendix A.

108,771 persons who emigrated, while in 1887 transoceanic emigration had surpassed all other destinations with 130,302 emigrants out of a total of 215,665. With few exceptions between 1887 to 1913 Italian transoceanic emigration prevailed over destinations in Europe and the Mediterranean basin. The exceptional years, however, did not reflect any significant shift of preference away from the Americas but rather these fluctuations were reactions to economic crisis in the United States.<sup>27</sup>

The intensification of emigration in the Mezzogiorno, beginning with 1887, culminated in such a frantic scramble to go to America that during the pre-World War I years of the twentieth century the movement gave an appearance of a real exodus. In 1876 the total number of persons who emigrated stood at 108,771 and by 1887 the number of emigrants had nearly doubled and had more than tripled by 1900 when the total number for that year was 352,782. In 1901 the number of Italian emigrants increased drastically to an impressive total of 533,245. Italian emigration reached its peak in 1913 when a total of 872,598 persons left the country, while the average yearly emigration from 1901 to 1913 involved more than 600,000 persons. Within this thirteen year period over eight million Italians went abroad and nearly five

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<sup>27</sup> Harry Jerome, Migration and Business Cycles (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., 1926), pp. 197-198, 205.

million of them went to the Americas. Emigration from the Mezzogiorno had contributed 46.7 per cent of the participants in this exodus, Veneto contributed another 16.3 per cent and together these two areas combined were responsible for 63 per cent of the total Italian emigration of 1901 to 1913.<sup>28</sup>

The consequences of the outbreak of the Great War almost brought a halt to the pattern of emigration. During the period 1915 to 1918 the annual average of emigration remained less than 100,000 persons and the majority of the participants were now going to European destinations. At the end of the hostilities, emigration once again began but not nearly with the same rhythm that had characterized the pre-war years of the twentieth century. From 1919 to 1927, an annual average of 318,419 emigrants left Italy, making a total of 2,865,378 for this entire period. This emigration was basically equally divided between European countries and overseas destinations. Beginning with 1928 emigration started to decline due to restrictive measures adopted by Italy and the various immigrant-receiving countries. Between 1928 and 1940 when once again war interrupted the emigration process, a total of 1,161,545 or an annual average of 89,349 emigrants had left the country.

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<sup>28</sup>Fontani, op. cit., p. 20; Veneto was the most un-industrialized northern region and its rural society had remnants of feudalism, that in some respects, were comparable to the existing semi-feudal milieus of the Mezzogiorno. Sereni, op. cit., p. 355.

In addition to its impermanent and male-dominated character, a third feature of Italian emigration was its overwhelmingly agrarian origin. Table III shows that the percentage of cultivators was substantial in 1878-80 and had risen by 1894-96 to almost half of the total emigrants. In addition, as Sereni has suggested, the majority of those emigrants who were classified as ground diggers or as rock cutters came really from the ranks of the contadini or of the braccianti (agricultural day labourers). In any case, even if the sum of only the agricultural workers and ground diggers is considered, it is safe to conclude that at the turn of the century close to 75 per cent of the mass emigration originated from agrarian settings.<sup>29</sup>

The political unification of the country had brought little relief to the people of the countryside. Certainly the decision of millions of contadini (of whom many were landless), to leave the young nation was not lacking justification. As the new state acquired the usual but costly trappings, such as an army, a navy and a central bureaucracy, the contadini were burdened with taxes to pay for something that brought them no tangible improvement. In addition, the state engaged in an ambitious and costly construction

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<sup>29</sup>These percentages coincide with the findings of Nitti for the period 1879-1886. He found that during this period the contadini made up 71.98% to 77.42% of the total transoceanic emigration, while the artisans and the day labourers averaged from 10.23% to 13.51%. Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 335.

TABLE III<sup>a</sup>

## EMIGRANTS ACCORDING TO PROFESSION

(per cent of males over 15 years of age)

Occupation	1878-80	1894-96
Agricultural workers ( <u>contadini</u> )	42	45
Navvy or ground diggers	21	26
Masons, rock cutters	16	17
Other workers and artisans	12	6
Other professions	9	6

<sup>a</sup>These figures are based on the official Italian "Statistica della emigrazione". Adapted from Sereni, op. cit., pp. 353-354.

of a railway network.<sup>30</sup> In a country where the industrial base was rather limited, the greater share of the fiscal burden of the state had to be absorbed by the impoverished cultivators.

Little emigration took place from cities within the regions of intense migration and even less from industrial centres. For instance, in analyzing the origin of the massive movement in the 1880's, Nitti found that from Cosenza, a major centre of Calabria that had a population of 16,686, only 66 persons had emigrated in 1884, 128 in 1885 and 175 in 1886, while from the "miserable" town of Grimaldi, located in the same province and with a population of 2,846 inhabitants, 8 persons had emigrated in 1884, 135 in 1885, and 73 in 1886. On the basis of his observations Nitti did not attribute the relative absence of the urban dwellers in the migration movement to any substantial standard of living they might have enjoyed over that of the peasantry. While in general the city worker was earning more than the agricultural worker, he was more prone to spend his money quickly. On the other hand, the contadino was accustomed by and large to live a more stringent life by only acquiring the barest essentials. These slowly accumulated savings, no matter how

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<sup>30</sup>Manzotti, op. cit., pp. 46-47. Between 1871 and 1875 nearly 1,500 kilometers of costly railroad tracks were constructed. In 1871 there were 6,637 state-owned kilometers of railroad and by 1913 there were 15,677 kilometers. Italy, Istituto Centrale Di Statistica. op. cit., p. 136.

meagre, proved invaluable for many contadini who were able to utilize these amounts to finance the initial voyage across the ocean. The unemployed city worker, had he wanted to emigrate, often did not possess the necessary financial means to pay for the trip. Generally, however, the notion to emigrate would not occur to him.<sup>31</sup>

Italian emigration, because of its agrarian homogeneity, its intensity and numerical magnitude particularly between 1887 and 1913, became a cause of major social upheaval in the Italian rural world. Prior to the political unification of the peninsula, despite the moderate internal and external currents of migration that had developed, its rural society had generally remained stable. "White child slavery" and the brigantaggio, however, were two social phenomena that foreshadowed the deep breaks that emigration was about to incur into the social fabric of the Italian rural milieu and particularly in that of the Mezzogiorno. At the height of the mass movement, a bitter landowner from a small town of Rogliano in Calabria assessed the phenomenon in a way that was representative of the views of the well-to-do by stating that emigration was born out of necessity, it grew into a desire and it had become an infectious plague.<sup>32</sup> Landowners

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<sup>31</sup>Nitti found that statistics indicated that the ratio of savings in the casse di risparmio (saving institutions) in the rural areas were more substantial in comparison to deposits in similar institutions in the urban areas. Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 351-352.

<sup>32</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 201.

were not likely to approve the movement since they resented the departure of hoards of impoverished men who had traditionally been viewed as necessary reservoirs of cheap labour for the agricultural world. Many emigrants who left Italy even after the first decade of the twentieth century did so out of dire necessity, just as had their predecessors.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. The Contadini and the Italian State

This unprecedented convulsion in the Italian rural world has been termed by Robert F. Foerster as a most extraordinary human exodus because it has had no equal in terms of the number of persons involved in such a large-scale movement over a such long period of time and because of the impact that the movement had in the receiving countries.<sup>34</sup> One of the most important factors that contributed to a viable and stable rural society prior to the unification of the country had been the integration of the peasant-based agricultural system and household industry. The political unification of the peninsula in removing border trade restrictions that had existed in the Mezzogiorno facilitated

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<sup>33</sup>In the course of my interviews with immigrants that came to Canada between 1901 to 1912, the height of the emigration or the stage described as an "infectuous plague", all asserted that they had left their towns because of dire poverty and lack of job opportunities.

<sup>34</sup>Foerster, op. cit., p. 3.

the movement of manufactured goods from the North into this area. Southern household industry could not compete with the lower prices of goods that arrived from factories in the North and from foreign countries. Consequently, slowly the economy of the Mezzogiorno was thrown into a state of chaos since both the household industry and a good portion of the infant industrial base that had existed in the area was undermined by lowered priced items that were produced outside the region. Inevitably the separation of agriculture and industry in both the North and the South broke the economic equilibrium of the world of the contadino. While in the North the growing industrial base absorbed a growing number of workers, in the South the segment of the population that a generation earlier was productively employed in the existing industry, and more so in the domestic crafts, was now forced to try to make a living from the overcrowded land. The net result of this agrarianization in the Mezzogiorno was that one's labour was not sufficient to provide an individual with the basic requirements of life.<sup>35</sup>

The political unification of the country in addition

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<sup>35</sup>The decline of l'industria casa lingua (household industry) is reflected, for instance, in the fluctuation of the price margin of wool and cotton between 1870 and 1890. In the case of raw wool and wool that was spun, the price dropped from 6,35 to 2,89 lire per kilogram, while the price of raw cotton and cotton that was spun declined from 1,67 to 0,86 lire. Emilio Sereni, op. cit., pp. 36-39, 358.

to facilitating the importation of lower-priced manufactured goods into the Mezzogiorno and effectively destroying the native industry also facilitated the emigration of liquid capital to the North where the growing industrial base offered lucrative investment opportunities.<sup>36</sup> This outward flow of liquid capital inevitably meant that little economic expansion would take place in the South.<sup>37</sup> The scarcity of money that was left in the area was reflected in the shocking usurious interest rates that the money-lenders were able to extort in the rural areas which ranged from 60 to 120 per cent

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<sup>36</sup> Antonio Gramsci. La Questione Meridionale (3rd ed.; Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973), p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> A sharp difference in the standard of living emerges between the North and the South of the peninsula. In 1890 the per capita wealth was at 2,411 lire in Northern Italy, 1,961 lire in the centre and 1,372 lire in the Mezzogiorno. Epicarmo Corbino, Annali Dell' Economia Italiana, III, (Citta Di Castello, 1953), pp. 16-19. Many divergent views have been advanced to explain the slower development of the southern economy and the relatively rapid increase of the northern industrial growth. Barzini, for instance, refutes any explanations that imply that the North's economic expansion may have been due to any natural or political advantage. His thesis rests on inherent cultural differences of the two areas. In his opinion, the people of these two areas have shared similar private aims which consist mainly of achieving security and prosperity for the family. Their approaches to realize their aims have differed. The northerner has aspired to achieve his goal through the acquisition of wealth, while the southerner's strategy to get at his goal consisted of less tangible means and he strove for power, authority, prestige and fame. Ultimately, Barzini postulates, "the industrial revolution was not congenial to the inhabitants of the Mezzogiorno. They instinctively felt that the gains were not worth the sacrifice. They felt happier at other pursuits." Luigi Barzini, The Italians (New York: Antheneum, 1965), pp. 234-241.

per year.<sup>38</sup> Only the growing amounts of deposits made by immigrants in the local saving institutions would eventually cause the lowering of the rate of interest around the turn of the twentieth century.

The adoption of stiff protectionist policies in 1887 by Italy on industrial products and on cereals had a particularly adverse impact upon the plight of the peasantry in the South who were now forced to pay higher prices for the manufactured goods from the North. Protectionist policies on agricultural goods also did not help the average cultivator since he only produced barely enough for his own consumption and had little surplus goods to market.<sup>39</sup> An increase in the price of grain due to the protectionist policy generally only helped the Latifondisti (wealthy landowners of the South) who were left with surpluses of cereals. Indeed, the protectionist measures on cereals were not taken with a sincere aim of improving the plight of the contadini, but rather had been adopted by the Italian government as a result of pressures from the lobbies of the northern cotton, wool, steel and engineering industries. These lobbies argued in favour of a tariff

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<sup>38</sup>Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 359.

<sup>39</sup>Gramsci, op. cit., pp. 56-57. Corbino's views coincide with Gramsci's analysis by pointing out that the economic situation was provoked by the Italian protectionist policies as a result of policies instigated by the interests of the northerners who neglected the interests of the southerners. Corbino, op. cit., p. 252.

on the importation of agricultural goods in order to appease the big landowners of the South who had shown considerable apprehension in the earlier years of the protectionist movement. The 1887 tariff " . . . dates the tacit alliance between heavy industry and wheat-growing landowners which was to dominate the Italian economy for sixty years. The duty on foreign wheat was the bribe which made higher industrial prices acceptable to one section of agriculture."<sup>40</sup> With much justification in the face of this powerful alliance of interests, and of the economic slump which followed between 1888-1896, in 1887 the contadini, and particularly those from the South, embarked on a major emigration pattern that only the Great War was to bring to a halt.

When in February, 1888, it was learned that the Italian government had entered into a secret military agreement with Germany as a party to the Triple Alliance it brought an immediate response from France in the form of a discriminatory tariff on the importation of Italian goods. The French reaction could not help but seriously hurt the Italian economy, since France prior to 1887 had been Italy's leading customer. During the period 1881-7, 41 per cent of Italian exports had gone to France although during the period 1888-90, following

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<sup>40</sup>The import duty on wheat was more than doubled in 1887 from 1.4 to 3 lire per quintal and in 1888 the agrarian lobby succeeded in having the duty on wheat raised to 5 lire per quintal. Seton-Watson, op. cit., pp. 82-83, 141-142.

the tariff, the value of Italian exports to that country, declined by 63 per cent. The tariff war with France greatly accentuated the existing poverty in Sicily, in particular, when the island exports of wine, fruit and sulphur were curtailed.<sup>41</sup>

In the midst of this economic stress the Sicilian poor first reacted in the form of militant protest and when that failed they turned to emigration in great numbers. De Felice Giuseppe, a leader of the political left in the city of Catania, formed a popular organization called Fascio dei Lavoratori in 1891. With amazing speed a network of Fasci (unions) sprang up throughout the island, usually led by socialist intellectuals from the middle classes and a few even from the nobility. The movement found widespread support among the landless cultivators when the wealthy landowners, in an effort to escape from the economic crisis, had increased their rents and had even revived dormant traditional contract stipulations.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the peasantry was faced with discriminatory local taxation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>In 1887 when the French market was open, wine sold for 40.5 lire per hectolitre and by 1890-93 had fallen to 10.2 lire. At the same time, prices of citrus fruits fell between one-third and one-half and the price of sulphur declined from 141 lire per ton in 1874-75 to 55 lire in 1894. Seton-Watson, op. cit., pp. 134, 141, 161.

<sup>42</sup>Salvatore Francesco Romano, Storia Dei Fasci Siciliani (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1959), pp. 26-27, 90-91.

<sup>43</sup>Consumer taxes levied at the local level were several times higher than in Northern Italy. Daniel L. Horowitz, The Italian Labour Movement (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 31.

The Fasci was a mass movement but it did not enjoy a homogeneous socialist ideology. Walls of their meeting places were sometimes simultaneously decorated with a crucifix, along with portraits of Marx, Mazzini, and the King and the Queen.<sup>44</sup> The movement, however, "was a manifestation of the traditional incendiary relations between the poor peasants and the large landholders, combined with immediate economic grievances."<sup>45</sup> After some impressive electoral victories and successful strikes in 1893, the movement was, at the instigation of the wealthy, crushed by the authorities. Giovanni Giolitti, then prime minister, writes in his memoirs that the movement was restricted to economic goals and highly justifiable in terms of the deplorable conditions of the miners and of the contadini. The Sicilian ruling class, not as yet used to popular protest, feared that the island was in the process of an incipient revolution and wanted the Fasci destroyed.<sup>46</sup> Although some of the wealthy landowners admitted that the conditions of the contadini warranted improvement, the only reform they proposed after the Fasci had been crushed was the abolition of elementary instruction, so that the contadini

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<sup>44</sup>B. King and T. Okey, Italy To-Day (London: James Nisbet & Co., Limited, 1901), p. 83.

<sup>45</sup>Horowitz, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>46</sup>Giovanni Giolitti, Memorie Della Mia Vita (Milano: Fratelli Treves, Editori, 1922), I, pp. 86-89.

and the miners, unable to read, would not be in a position to absorb new ideas. Astonishingly in 1901, the wages for workers in Sicily, instead of having improved, had actually deteriorated.<sup>47</sup> The wealthy were entrenched in their attitude that their privileged position could be safeguarded only through social immobility.<sup>48</sup>

The complete failure of the Fasci to bring about any improvement convinced many Sicilians, who up to then had been reluctant to emigrate, that the only hope was in emulating their counterparts in the peninsula and go to America. Table I (above) demonstrates a strong correlation between the repression of the Fasci and a trend of increased emigration. During 1876 and 1886 there were only seven emigrants per 10,000 inhabitants, and 44 for the period from 1887 to 1900. From 1901 to 1909 the number of emigrants grew sharply to 210 per 10,000 inhabitants.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Fear of introducing change in the rural world was not limited to the ruling class of Sicily, but was also present in the peninsula itself. A case in point which illustrates this attitude occurred in a small Calabrian village in the 1920's. When a wealthy landowner noted that an elementary teacher was effectively following an academic curriculum in teaching the children of the contadini, he plainly told the teacher to cut down on academics and concentrate on sports and marching. The landowner complained that if the children of the contadini acquired reading and writing skills, the traditional dependancy that the peasantry had on the educated sons of the landowners would be undermined. Interview with Pasquale Arella, Thunder Bay, July 20, 1974.

With the decline of the rural economy and an official remedy of repression rather than reform, the life of the rural world was made constantly further intolerable by a sharp rise in the population. Although the actual birth rate after 1860 had begun to decline, epidemics and famines were claiming fewer victims. It is estimated that in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the natural annual increase was 3/1,000, while this figure had risen to 6/1,000 at the time of unification and ten years later had surged to 11/1,000. At the same time the death rate dropped from 30/1,000 to under 20/1,000 in the period between 1875 and 1915. Despite Italy's escalating emigration, its population showed an increase of over six million during 1880 and 1910.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Rural Land Arrangements and The Social Hierarchy

While the waves of Italian emigration flowed from the rural areas of the peninsula to North America, the conditions of the contadini varied considerably because of regional differences of soil productivity and structural differences of the various land holdings arrangements. In the North, where the feudal legacies were few even prior to the unification,

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<sup>49</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 51.

agricultural activity was developing along capitalist ways.<sup>50</sup> This development was possible since land tenure was generally based on individually owned and operated farms with conglomerates of communally owned summer pastures and forests. In addition, producer and consumer co-operatives were widespread. In the Centre, land was largely controlled by a minority of wealthy individuals. Here the land was worked by mezzadri (share farmers), or by hired gang labourers who were supervised by the landowner or by managerial personnel. Under the terms of a mezzadria contract, the landowner usually provided the contadino with a dwelling for his family and also was expected to provide half of the working capital. As in the Centre, in Apulia land was owned by a wealthy minority. Land was worked generally under three types of contracts. Some major estates were cultivated by gang labourers who received daily wages. Fixed renting agreements, on the other hand, made the cultivator responsible for an agreed sum regardless of the crop yield and in return he was free to cultivate the land independently. The other alternative of cultivating land was to enter into the contratti a miglioria (improvement contracts), under which the cultivator took his directions from the landlord and was repaid for improvements that were made on the land. In both Apulia and

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<sup>50</sup>Fontani, op. cit., p. 12.

the Centre, the landowning class tended to take an active interest in agriculture and was eager to introduce new and improved methods in agriculture and by doing so rendered agricultural activity much more profitable than in the regions of the South.

While in the Mezzogiorno plenty of land was concentrated in huge estates known as latifondi, there were also small and middle-range land proprietors. Small landowners usually found it necessary to work on additional land under a variety of contracts ranging from seasonal share-cropping to ordinary hired labour. Unlike Apulia and the Centre, the wealthier landowners were generally absentee and took little active interest in agricultural activity with the result that new methods of agriculture implemented elsewhere were unlikely to reach the poor and illiterate peasantry of the South. Here too, the plight of the share-cropper was most miserable since he was burdened with the responsibility of providing most of the capital of which he had only too little. The latifondista rarely invested his capital in agricultural improvement schemes; he would only invest it in purchasing more land.<sup>51</sup>

In the post-unification era, the latifondo had actually undergone expansion due to the unscrupulous usurpers of common lands. The wealthy landlords who took over the

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<sup>51</sup>J. S. Macdonald, "Agricultural Organization, Migration and Labour Militancy in Rural Italy", Economic History Review, Second Series, XVI (1963), pp. 61-75.

public lands with various pretexts often did so with the quiet protection of the civil authorities that were particularly charged to prevent any tempering with public lands.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the poor quality of land and a lack of irrigation water militated against the viability of the piccola proprietà (land held by small owner-operators).<sup>53</sup> The contadino who worked as a share-cropper for the latifondista, on the other hand, had the advantage of having access to a greater quantity and variety of land and also to essential agricultural aids that the landlord's manor provided.

Generally too, the contadino of the Mezzogiorno unlike the North American farmer did not live on the fields that he cultivated but travelled back and forth to the fields from

<sup>52</sup>A case in point was the commune of Ferruzzano in the province of Reggio Calabria. According to Nitti, in that commune there were eighty-three usurpers of the common forest at the turn of the century. Included in this collection of extra-legal entrepreneurs, were two brothers of the commune's mayor, one administrator who worked for the brother of the mayor, one brother of a local councillor, six councillors, two wives of councillors, three commune assessors, and one member of the provincial forest committee. Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 125.

<sup>53</sup>Even as late as the middle of the twentieth century the piccola proprietà in the Mezzogiorno was mainly in areas where the terrain was rocky and steep, which made it incapable of yielding very much. In the plains more substantial farming was possible. There the land was concentrated under the control of wealthy landlords. Land cultivated along capitalist lines was still insignificant. Giuseppe Medici, I Tipi D'Impresa Nell' Agricoltura Italiana (Roma: Istituto Nazionale Di Economia Agraria, 1951), pp. 41, 81, 84.

a hamlet or a town.<sup>54</sup> According to Grazia Dore, particularly in the areas where the intensity level of migration was highest, agricultural arrangements had remained largely nomadic. This nomadism added considerable hardships to the life of the contadino who had to travel considerable distances on a continuous basis to tend to the crops in the various plots of land that were spread out in the area.<sup>55</sup> As one old contadino told Nitti at the turn of the century, the better lands were far from his hamlet. It took him four hours of walking to reach one of the fields which he cultivated. The route was not an easy one since it involved climbing and descending sharp hills. For all his work he reported to have harvested half of the actual amount of seeds that he had planted in a field nearby, while the better lands had yielded him only double or triple the seeds that had been planted. In his opinion, with such yields, it was better to go and beg all over the world rather than to remain there to work the land.<sup>56</sup>

Land tenure in Sicily, also a region of intense migration commencing in 1901, was much like the mainland of the South, namely composed of a combination of the Latifondo

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<sup>54</sup>Dore, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>55</sup>J. S. McDonald, "Italy's Rural Social Structure And Emigration", Occidente, XII, (Sept.-Oct., 1956), p. 446.

<sup>56</sup>Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 27-28.

and of small and medium-sized holdings. Here too, wealthy landowners took little interest in agriculture. They often gave the management of their lands to gabelloti (middlemen) who in turn divided the land and engaged individual cultivators under share-cropping, or short-term fixed-rent contracts.<sup>57</sup>

Among the more prosperous cultivators were the tenant farmers of Lombardy and the mezzadri of certain areas of the Centre and particularly those of Tuscany. The small landowners of the Alpine foothills and of the Mezzogiorno, ironically enough, were in many cases in a worse economic condition than the mezzadri. Worst off of all the cultivators were the braccianti who were found throughout the rural world. These landless peasants, who by their day-labour lived at the edge of destitution, composed over half of the Italian agricultural population during the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

The greater portion of the huge waves of emigrants in addition to their agrarian origins came mainly from regions where lingering feudalism and poor soil had rendered back-breaking agricultural work extremely unprofitable for the peasantry. As Table II (above) indicates these areas were Veneto, most of the regions of the Mezzogiorno and Sicily. Within these less developed agricultural areas initially it

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<sup>57</sup>Macdonald, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>58</sup>Seton-Watson, op. cit., p. 23.

was not the bracciantato, the most depressed class who emigrated. Rather the movement originally developed to a greater and more consistent extent in communes where the piccola proprieta, and not the latifondo, was the dominant economic structure. These small owner-cultivators were in a position to be able to raise the necessary money required for the voyage; if they did not have it on hand, they could procure it by either borrowing the amount, in which case the land could be used as collateral, or by selling the land altogether. Once abroad they would soon send home il pezzettino (a ticket) to friends and relatives so that they too could make the voyage. By contrast, in areas dominated by the latifondo the initial steps to migrate were more difficult and the movement from such areas usually started later.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, until the turn of the century when remittances from immigrants had found their way to local saving institutions in substantial amounts and made borrowing money much easier, it had been rather difficult for a person like a bracciante with no collateral to offer to be able to borrow enough money to emigrate. As a man who had returned from New York after a twenty month stay told Nitti (who was conducting his inquiry into the conditions of the contadini of the Mezzogiorno), a few years earlier it had been difficult to borrow money to emigrate. Then when a lender was found one had to have a

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<sup>59</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 41.

guarantor and be prepared to pay fifty per cent annual interest. After the turn of the century, apparently, it was not so difficult any more to be able to borrow money to emigrate with only ten per cent interest. Those who emigrated to America, he added, found no difficulty being able to repay the loan in time.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to finding it more difficult to raise the necessary funds to emigrate, the peasantry of the latifondo was likely to be more tied to the land and less mobile since he was bound by contractual obligations that could not be abandoned on the spur of the moment. Then too, these share-croppers had to overcome the pressures of the landlords who generally tried to discourage migration. In the post-unification era the topic of emigration had become a truly national question. The debate was dominated by the emotional outcries of those who opposed the idea.<sup>61</sup> Strong opposition was voiced particularly by the landlords from Veneto and from the Mezzogiorno, the two leading contributing areas of emigration.<sup>62</sup>

The Latifondisti feared that a significant loss of contadini from the rural areas would mean that inevitably they would have to offer the peasantry better terms to acquire their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>61</sup> Manzotti, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 382.

labour, since the latter would be in greater demand. Their public utterances on the matter, however, usually did not involve full disclosure of their vested interest. Shrewdly, the landlords coated their rhetoric with a tinge of pseudo-patriotism, arguing the fields of the patria (motherland) were being left idle due to a lack of braccia (human arms), while the fields left uncultivated were continuously losing their value.<sup>63</sup> As a panacea to solve the problems of the Italian rural world they advocated the placing of official barriers to emigration. Their arguments were often strengthened by economists who also theorized that emigration was indeed a loss to the country.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1870's when Italian emigration was but at its infant stage the wealthy landlords were already alarmed by what they conceived to be a general trend of depopulation of the agrarian world and they began to apply political pressure against the movement. The Chamber of Commerce of Bari, a major city in Apulia, issued a statement which called attention to the sadness that emigration caused the families that were separated and it claimed that public opinion was perturbed as well. In addition, the document called attention to the apparent lack of strong coloni (cultivators) and that all this was due to the febbre di emigrazione (emigration fever). The

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>64</sup>King and Okey, op. cit., p. 319.

Chambers of Commerce of Catanzaro and of Foggia (two major centres of Calabria and Apulia respectively) also issued appeals in 1876 demanding that emigration be halted on the pragmatic grounds that local landlords were claiming there was a shortage of contadini available to work their fields. The northern areas of the peninsula such as in Cremona and Udine (two major centres located in Lombardy and Veneto respectively) voiced similar concerns to the highest levels of governments.<sup>65</sup>

The crusade against emigration was stimulated not only by the concern over the alleged real or imaginary shortage of cultivators that it produced. Above all the agrarian oligarchy feared that emigration would upset the social hierarchy which they desperately strove to maintain and this concern was the crux of the zealous opposition to emigration.<sup>66</sup> The President of the Agrarian Association of Udine articulated this fear by warning of dire social consequences that emigration would produce that would be more serious by far than the immediate economic losses. His remarks were echoed in parliament by the honourable Antonibon in 1879. The fellow deputies

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<sup>65</sup>Manzotti, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

<sup>66</sup>Dore concurs that in the post-unification year of the nineteenth century and throughout the era of large-scale emigration, the Italian agrarian world was conscious of its precarious state. "Italian agriculture, which had appeared prosperous before the agrarian revolution overthrew the old rural economies, could no longer sustain the confrontation with the more progressive nations. It had become conscious of its poverty and feared the future." Dore, op. cit., p. 97.

were warned that in addition to the loss of productive forces such as manpower, emigration was already causing the destruction of patti colonici (contractual agreements between landlords and contadini) and even more seriously, emigration was giving rise to listlessness in work and general insubordination among the peasantry in all the towns where the febbre di emigrazione had infiltrated. Antonibon went on to say that emigration was an evil, a morbo morale (moral plague), and repeated a popular charge that the phenomenon was not spontaneous but that it was artificially induced by dishonest emigration agents who stood to profit from the human traffic.<sup>66</sup>

Antonibon's thesis, which was representative of the general opinion against emigration, was criticized by the Rassegna Settimanale, a magazine representing the most enlightened conservatism of the South. The magazine noted that Antonibon's argument was contradictory since on the one hand he lamented the desertion of the rural world, and on the other hand he pretended to display deep humanitarian concern for the terrible fate that the contadini would possibly meet in the foreign lands and for their alleged exploitation by emigration agents.<sup>67</sup> The debate raged on into the twentieth century, but emigration remained relatively free of government interference until 1914, since the outcries of the rural interests

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<sup>66</sup>Manzotti, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

were effectively balanced by the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, who saw in emigration possibilities of increased foreign trade due to a demand for Italian goods by immigrants abroad and therefore opposed obstacles to limit the movement.<sup>68</sup>

The pleas of the landlords no matter how appealing to the nationalist sentiment and how well supported by the rationalizations of professional economists went unheard by the determined contadini, the agricultural braccianti and inevitably by the small artisans who were forced to join the exodus because as contadini left their services became less in demand. The magnitude of emigration was such that at times over one-third of a town's population was in America by the turn of the century. In 1901 when the prime minister of Italy, G. Zanardelli, ventured into the Southern Italian town of Moliterno, he was greeted by the mayor with the following revelation: "I greet you in the name of my eight

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<sup>68</sup>Fontani, op. cit., p. 14. Until 1914 government legislation on emigration was limited to preventing abuses from being inflicted by the various agents involved in the human traffic. Prior to the Great War two sets of legislative regulations were passed. The first in 1888 required that agents be licensed, providing that they could meet certain criteria. Also in each province a commission was set up with the task of providing information and advice to emigrants and of receiving their grievances regarding any abuses. In 1901 the second set of regulations established a Commissioner of Emigration, with a Council which was not to limit the migration outflow but rather to further systematize the conduct of the various interests involved in the huge movement of people. Taylor, op. cit., p. 122.

thousand fellow citizens, three thousand of whom are in America, and the other five thousand preparing to follow them."<sup>69</sup>

The great exodus from the Italian agrarian world between 1887 to 1914 was basically a reaction to the realization on the part of the contadini that they could expect no substantial improvement within their society and this was a route to escape from the vicious circle of poverty. When the peasantry was faced with starvation, it had often resorted to spontaneous revolts in desperate attempts to correct the inequities; however, each time their efforts had resulted in grim defeat and swift repression, as had been the case with the Fasci.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4. Education and Literacy

Aside from militant means, the peasantry had no other way of influencing change within their society. They could not influence decisions through the national-political process, since the franchise was extended to a privileged

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<sup>69</sup>Sereni, op. cit., p. 351. (my translation). The depopulation from the town of Moliterno was not unique. For additional incidents of this type, see Nitti, op. cit., I, pp. 180, 183-184.

<sup>70</sup>A rich source of information on Italian peasant and labour militancy is contained in Maurice F. Neufeld, Italy: School for Awakening Countries. (Ithaca, New York: Cayuga Press, Inc., 1961).

minority, only those who could meet property and literacy qualifications. In 1870 there were only 530,018 eligible voters or two per cent of the entire population. In 1909, that is, thirty-nine years after the unification of the country, the number of qualified voters had risen to 2,930,473 which represented only 8.3 per cent of the total population.<sup>71</sup>

In 1882 the political left which was then in power, had extended the suffrage but stopped short of what it had earlier pledged, namely to abolish the property and educational criteria that would have made possible the enfranchisement of the peasantry. The fear was that this segment of the population was likely to lend political support to the forces of reaction and at the same time increase the political power of the Catholic Church. The bill of 1882 did reduce the minimum voting age from twenty-five to twenty-one and reduced the property qualifications. The literacy test was retained and became an acceptable means for gaining voting eligibility independent of economic standings. It was not until 1911 that universal male suffrage was made into law. This legislation, however, still discriminated mildly against the average contadino who in the majority of cases was illiterate. The bill provided that all literate males were eligible to vote at

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<sup>71</sup>Italy. Istituto Centrale Di Statistica, op. cit., p. 105.

twenty-one while illiterate males were allowed to vote only after the completion of compulsory military service or, failing this, in reaching the age of thirty.<sup>72</sup>

Although compulsory elementary education had been introduced in 1877 for all children between the ages of six and nine, the legislation was only haphazardly applied, particularly in the rural South.<sup>73</sup> B. King and T. Okey observed that at the turn of the twentieth century legislation on compulsory education was "largely a dead-letter" as far as the peasantry was concerned. Extreme poverty made it necessary for the contadini to keep their children in the fields although in principle they wanted them to have education.

Similarly the poor town labourers were also forced for economic reasons to send their children to silk or cotton factories as soon as the offspring reached nine years of age at which time children could be legally employed in such institutions. Many parents, too, kept their children away from school that may have been miles from their hamlets, simply because they could not afford to decently cloth them.<sup>74</sup>

Until 1911 the greater portion of the costs of elementary education, or "people's schools" as they were

<sup>72</sup>Seton-Watson, op. cit., pp. 15-17, 50, 281-282.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>74</sup>King and Okey, op. cit., p. 235.

known, fell upon the budget resources of the communes and this structural aspect militated against the general application of the legislation on education. The local administrations were often too poor to be able to provide the schools but more importantly, the men who controlled these local governments and the wealthy landlords were generally hostile to the concept of universal education for social reasons. The school inspectors openly stipulated in their reports that the communes were the bitterest foes of the "people's schools" and that the local oligarchies saw in popular education "a levelling force, which frightens them." Indeed, in certain Sicilian towns, some school registers of attendance had been destroyed by the opposing elements.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 242-243. Political scientist Edward C. Banfield, who conducted a recent study of a southern Italian town, and whose findings have been accepted by the author to be representative of the larger society of the Mezzogiorno, may have, prematurely disregarded the remarks made to him by the peasants who charged that the wealthy members of their towns had deliberately impeded educational development for them: "For example, some peasants think that the school has not been improved because the gentry intended to keep them illiterate in order to exploit them more readily. This argument assumes, of course, that the gentlemen are foresighted enough to make provisions now for a situation which will exist 20 or 30 years hence, and that they have talked the matter over and have agreed upon a policy. In fact, the upper class, however selfish it may be in its attitude toward the peasants, is not capable of such effective action in this or any other matter." Banfield was even more reluctant to believe the charge of a peasant regarding emigration: "An even more fantastic allegation -- but one which is interesting for this very reason as an example of how far the peasant thinks the gentry will go in pursuit of their opposed interesse -- is that the town officials deliberately suppressed a supply of circulars which told how to emigrate to America. If any such circulars existed, the reason they were not distributed was almost

In many cases the wealthy members of the agrarian world could not accept seeing the children of peasants sharing the same school benches with their own. Under these circumstances, the laws drafted by the Ministry of Education were not totally implemented at the local level while the "small army of inspectors" of the Ministry was doing little to persecute local authorities who were sabotaging popular education.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the several factors which inhibited access to elementary education for most of the children of the peasantry, the degree of illiteracy in various parts of Italy was phenomenal. Calabria and Basilicata, two regions of intensive emigration between 1887 and 1913, recorded, as Table IV demonstrates, what were the highest illiteracy rates of the nation. The province of Potenza, located in Basilicata

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certainly ordinary indifference and incompetence." Edward C. Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 11, 125. On the basis of statements made by Seton-Watson that hegemony of the wealthy landowners extended until 1947 and on the basis of the preceding analysis of the rural oligarchy, it appears that the remarks made to Banfield by various peasants were well supported by historical evidence. Seton-Watson, op. cit., p. 83. Banfield's study has, however, been accepted by immigration scholars. See Nelli, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>76</sup>King and Okey, op. cit., pp. 235-243. New legislation designed to remedy the appalling state of education, particularly in the rural South, was passed in 1911. Education was centralized and more of its costs were taken over by the state and the school-leaving age was raised to the age of twelve. Seton-Watson, op. cit., p. 262.

TABLE IV<sup>a</sup>

ILLITERACY IN CERTAIN ITALIAN PROVINCES  
 ACCORDING TO THE CENSUSES OF 1871 AND 1901

Province	1871 Census		1901 Census	
	Illiterates of 6 years of age and over	Illiterates of 20 years of age and over	Illiterates of 6 years of age and over	Illiterates of 20 years of age and over
Potenza	88.0	87.3	75.4	78.7
Cosenza	89.0	88.2	79.2	81.3
Catanzaro	85.5	84.8	78.3	79.0
Reggio di Calabria	86.3	86.6	78.7	79.2
Entire Italy	68.5	68.7	48.5	52.3

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 336.

records an illiteracy rate in 1871 of 87.3 per one hundred inhabitants of twenty years of age and over. This figure had declined only to 78.7 by 1901. In Calabria the province of Cosenza had the highest illiteracy rate then followed by Catanzaro and Reggio di Calabria. In 1871 in the province of Cosenza, 88.2 per one hundred of its inhabitants twenty years of age and over were illiterate and the rate had declined slightly by 1901 to 81.3. These two regions of intense emigration, that is Basilicata and Calabria, had illiteracy rates well above the national rate which for the same category of people in 1871 was at 68.7 per one hundred inhabitants and 52.3 in 1901.

The Italian Government's legislation on education in 1911, which was designed to improve the literacy rate particularly in the rural areas of the Mezzogiorno, had been preceded by an active interest in education by the families of the illiterate americani. One of the most common messages sent from America by the contadini to their wives was to send the children to school. At the turn of the century, many classrooms had become overcrowded due to the widespread attendance of the children of the americani. Moreover, the americani were no longer content with the five elementary grades and were sending their children to private schools.<sup>77</sup>

The trip to America, then, in addition to being

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<sup>77</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, pp. 337-338.

economically profitable, was also a potentially educational experience for the average contadino, who had been brought up in a campanalismo (localism) environment. Having journeyed to distant locations across the sea with no knowledge of geography or of the language spoken by the receiving countries, the illiterate contadino, who found he had to solicit the help of a friend or stranger to write an intimate letter back home, could not help but come to the conclusion that, aside from trying to earn enough money to better his economic situation, an equal priority was now to send his children to school.

##### 5. Returning Americani

Because one of the basic characteristics of Italian emigration was its temporary orientation, a significant number of Italian nationals returned home each year either to remain or simply visit for a short period. Foerster wrote in 1919 that about two-thirds of the total Italian emigration had been temporary. On the basis of the data available, he estimated that between 300,000 and 400,000 Italians returned from abroad yearly during the period 1902 to 1914.<sup>78</sup> The americano who returned home with a "small fortune" was at a

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<sup>78</sup>Foerster, op. cit., p. 42.

loss to know how to make the best use of it. To his surprise, he found that the price of land had increased enormously since he had first left his village. With no one to give them advice, as one such contadino complained, there was little hope that they could improve themselves without schooling.<sup>79</sup> In Italy the americani had little opportunity to invest their money in anything else besides following the established pattern of investment that existed. Particularly in the rural South, most savings went into non-risk investments such as house buying, State bonds and straight deposits.<sup>80</sup> While it is true that the many contadini who had been landless prior to their trip to America were then able with the bundle of money that they had bought back to fulfill their life-long desire of becoming piccoli proprietari coltivatori (independent contadini), the rural economy was still as unrewarding as ever even for the small independent cultivators.<sup>81</sup>

Certainly there was some truth in the assertion of the wealthy landlords of the Mezzogiorno that the poor quality of land, coupled with agricultural structural difficulties imposed by the haphazard nature of irrigation facilities, rendered the farm of the small owner-cultivator unprofitable.

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<sup>79</sup>A proprietor from Reggio di Calabria told Nitti's inquiry that the americani were paying phenomenal prices for land and usually more than double the actual value of the land. Ibid., pp. 337-338, 49.

<sup>80</sup>Macdonald, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>81</sup>Dore, op. cit., p. 121.

Only when huge tracts of land were consolidated, they claimed, in the form of the latifondo, did agriculture become most profitable for both the landlord and the peasant. Nitti, too, came to the conclusion, after examining the productivity of agricultural land in the South, that the piccola propriet  was not a viable economic unit. He predicted that due to the nature of the lands, even if the latifondo was to be dismantled by legislation and the land was to be distributed to single private holdings, in time the small proprietors would inevitably become landless again.<sup>82</sup>

Regardless of the conditions of the small peasant proprietors, many of the americani who returned home acquired their own lands. As Senator Giustino Fortunato told his colleagues in 1909, the braccianti and contadini readily returned to the soil. Only the craftsmen who returned from America would refuse to accept jobs beneath the rank for which they had been trained. His colleague, Senator Pasquale Villari, pointed out some of the disappointments experienced by the returning americani:

Then these men return from abroad, unable to work in the fields. They disparage their country. They cannot get used to the modest life of our people . . . They return with a few dollars, with five or six thousand lire, and buy a house, but they are unable to adapt to the life of our people. They return three or four times to America

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<sup>82</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, pp. 34, 42-43.

where they end up Americanized or else stay in Italy where they are of little use as citizens.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to the unattractive nature of the economic unit of the piccola propriet , the americani who purchased land, particularly in the South, had to contend with the paradox whereby while property in land was highly linked with socioeconomic status, yet the cultivators were socially looked down upon by the bourgeoisie of the towns. The contadini were referred to as cafoni (simpletons).<sup>84</sup> The realization that there was no bright future for the americano in Italy both economically and socially, even with the precious bundle of hard-earned money, caused many to decide to return to America. Some, of course, had not even bothered to return home, while others returned three or four times for short stays and in many cases it was simply to visit their home town and possibly to find a mate at the same time.

In his return voyage to America the americano found eager fellow villagers who wanted to emigrate and took advantage of his knowledge of the unknown world by accompanying

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<sup>83</sup>Quoted in Betty Boyd Caroli, Italian Repatriation From the United States, 1900-1914 (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1973), pp. 69-70.

<sup>84</sup>Macdonald, op. cit., p. 118. A vivid account of the negative and disparaging attitudes of the gentry towards the contadini as they existed in a small village in Lucania in the middle of the 1930's is provided in Carlo Levi, Christ Stopped at Eboli, Translated by Frances Frenaye (Westmin Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1948).

him to a city or a work site across the ocean. Others simply left their homes on the basis of letters sent to the persons from the town who had ventured out first. Italian emigration was then not an organized process by an agency, but it developed on the basis of a self-generating chain migration.<sup>85</sup> This pattern of migration led to the establishment of neighbourhoods in various North American communities based on the regional and sometimes even on the village background of the immigrants.<sup>86</sup>

Widely diffused among the contadini who undertook the trek to America was the desire to fulfill two great goals. First, earning sufficient money to purchase a house, however small, as long as it kept il capo coperto (the head covered as they used to say). Secondly, the landless hoped to become, upon his return, a piccolo proprietario coltivatore (an independent owner-cultivator). These two humble goals represented almost miraculous socio-economic mobility for the peasantry. Departing for America usually in a state of illiteracy, the peasant was taking with him only his strong arms and his will. In America he would live a humble life and undergo tremendous hardships with the intention of returning home as a successful americano.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph J. Barton, Peasants and Strangers--Italians, Rumanians and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 49-50.

<sup>86</sup> Vecoli, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 35.

Within the context of the Italian rural world there was little hope for any significant degree of socio-economic mobility amongst the peasantry. In 1907 a proprietor from Potenza summed up the reason why emigration had reached proportions of an exodus from the hamlets of the Mezzogiorno. In Lucania, it would have taken a miracle for a contadino, even if he fasted, to save one thousand lire in an entire lifetime, while in America that amount could be saved within a single year.<sup>88</sup> Even the illiterate contadino could readily come to terms with this tremendous economic gap which existed between his village and America and little wonder that he caught the contagious emigration fever. Refusal to emigrate meant continuation of perpetual poverty that was not likely to change in one's lifetime. Carlo Levi, who for his opposition to Fascism was banished to a small village in Lucania after the start of the Abyssinian War in 1935 found that there the plight of the peasantry was as horrible as it had been for centuries and that America was still viewed as an earthly paradise. Though somewhat lengthy, Levi's vivid description of the contadini's plight merits quotation:

The peasants' houses were all alike, consisting of only one room that served as a kitchen, bedroom, and usually as quarters for the barnyard animals

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

as well, unless there happened to be an outhouse, which they described with a dialect word of Greek derivation, catoico. On one side of the room was the stove; sticks brought in every day from the fields served as fuel, and the walls and ceiling were blackened with smoke. The only light was that from the door. The room was almost entirely filled by an enormous bed, much larger than an ordinary double bed; in it slept the whole family, father, mother and children. The smallest children, before they were weaned, that is until they were three or four years old, were kept in little reed cradles or baskets hung from the ceiling just above the bed. When the mother wanted to nurse them she did not have to get out of bed; she simply reached out and pulled the baby down to her breast, then put him back and with one motion of her hand made the basket rock like a pendulum until he had ceased to cry.

Under the bed slept the animals, and so the room was divided into three layers: animals on the floor, people in the bed, and infants in the air. When I bent over a bed to listen to a patient's heart or to give an injection to a woman whose teeth were chattering with fever or who was burning up with malaria, my head touched the hanging cradles, while frightened pigs and chickens darted between my legs.

But what never failed to strike me most of all --and by now I had been in almost every house-- were the eyes of the two inseparable guardian angels that looked at me from the wall over the bed. On one side was the black, scowling face, with its large, inhuman eyes, of the Madonna of Viggiano; on the other a coloured print of the sparkling eyes, behind gleaming glasses, and the hearty grin of President Roosevelt. I never saw other pictures or images than these: not the King nor the Duce, nor even Garibaldi; no famous Italian of any kind, nor any one of the appropriate saints; only Roosevelt and the Madonna of Viggiano never failed to be present. To see them there, one facing the other, in cheap prints, they seemed the two faces of the power that has divided the universe between them. But here their roles were quite rightly, reversed. The Madonna appeared to be a fierce, pitiless, mysterious, ancient earth goddess, the Saturnian mistress of this world; a sort of all-powerful Zeus, the benevolent and smiling master

of a higher sphere. Sometimes a third image formed, along with these two, trinity: a dollar bill, the last of those brought back from across the sea, or one that had come in the letter of a husband or relative, was tacked up under the Madonna or the President, or else between them, like the Holy Ghost or an ambassador from heaven to the world of the dead.

To the peasants of Lucania Rome means very little; it is the capital of the gentry, the centre of a foreign and hostile world. Naples has more right to be their capital, and in some ways it is; it is the capital of poverty. Those who live there have pale faces and feverish eyes; on sweltering summer days you can see half-dressed women sleep at tables, through the open doors of the houses of the poor along the steep alleys off the Toledo. But at Naples, for a long time, there has been no king, and the peasants go there only to embark for other shores. The Kingdom of Naples has perished, and the kingdom of the hopelessly poor is not of this world. Their other world is America. Even America, to the peasants, has a dual nature. It is a land where a man goes to work, where he toils and sweats for his daily bread, where he lays aside a little money only at the cost of endless hardship and privation, where he can die and no one will remember him. At the same time, and with no contradiction in terms, it is an earthly paradise and the promised land.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, during the intense migration years of 1901 to 1913 able-bodied men felt a social stigma against their masculinity if they had not been to America to try to improve their socio-economic condition. Under this social climate, some men were known to purposely marry in order to utilize the dowry of their wives to finance the journey across the ocean and in some of these cases the men migrated before the marriage itself was consummated. These men left

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<sup>89</sup> Levi, op. cit., pp. 120-122.

legally married with the intention of getting together with their wives on their return from America.<sup>90</sup>

Not all who emigrated returned successful; many did perish in the process. But the contadino looked mainly at the fortunes that had been acquired in a very short time by others like them. A sad contadino told Nitti that he had not been able to emigrate because of lack of funds and that among his fellows who had improved their positions many had done so with American money. The americano who returned successfully to his hamlet with a little bundle of money provided a powerful motivation for others to follow. Not only did such a man return with sums of money that had hitherto been unheard of, but he hardly appeared to be the same person that the town's folk thought they had known before. As the secretary of a league of contadini of Paola, a city in the South, observed in 1908, those who emigrated and returned from America were usually in better health than when they had first left. Apparently, these americani were no longer recognizable: they had left as mere brutes and returned as civilized men.<sup>91</sup>

In the midst of the emigration fever, Nitti made the interesting observation that among the humble classes one

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<sup>90</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 160.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp. 160, 173-174.

was born with the idea of going to America. When his commission asked a child what he would do when he became an adult, the answer was promptly given that then he would go to America.<sup>92</sup> In the rural world and particularly that of the Mezzogiorno by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, emigration had become such a deep-rooted social force that only the circumstances of the Great War could diffuse its power of attraction.

Emigration to America for the Italian rural world, in addition to meeting the needs of individuals who were at the verge of starvation, had become also the most accessible means for social mobility. For many of the landless cultivators, it was a means of escaping from the repressive semi-feudal order. It is then not surprising, to find that the great Italian exodus coincided with the "great push" in the Italian economy which Alexander Gerschenkron defines as 1896 to 1908.<sup>93</sup> Ironically, this "great push" was largely restricted to industrial activity in the North<sup>94</sup> and went unnoticed by the traditionally agrarian, depressed regions where its peasantry swelled the great trek to North America.

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>93</sup>Alexander Gerschenkron, "Notes on the Rate of Industrial Growth in Italy, 1881-1913", The Journal of Economic History, XV, 4 (December, 1955), p. 364.

<sup>94</sup>Fontani, op. cit., p. 20.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "PICK AND SHOVEL BRIGADE" IN CANADA

#### 1. Canada's Contadini Pioneers

The contadini started to trickle into Canada in the 1880's when the current of Italian transatlantic emigration which hitherto had been focused toward South America, slowly began to shift toward the United States and to a lesser extent to Canada. Prior to the arrival of the contadini only a small number of people from the Italian peninsula had found their way to Canada. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some officers and men from the Italian peninsula, as a result of having served as mercenaries in military regiments in North America, had decided to remain in Canada. Some had served in the Carignan-Salières Regiment which had been dispatched in 1665 by Louis XIV for the defence of New France against Iroquois attacks. Others who stayed behind had also served as mercenaries in two other European regiments, de Meuron and de Watteville, that had been engaged by the British army to fight against the

United States in the hostilities of 1812-1814.<sup>1</sup> Also in the nineteenth century some of the successful northern Italian merchants in the United States and some of the skilled craftsmen had crossed the border in search of opportunities and established themselves in Montreal.<sup>2</sup>

This haphazard arrival of people from the Italian peninsula was up to the eve of the Italian mass emigration, not very significant numerically. By 1881, out of a total Canadian population of 4,324,810 only 1,849 were, according to the census, of Italian racial origin and of these a mere 777 were of actual Italian birth.<sup>3</sup>

Following Confederation the Canadian Government by 1879 had adopted a National Policy which encompassed three distinctive components: the building of a transcontinental railway, settlement of the Northwest, and the implementation of a tariff designed to induce domestic manufacturing development. The intended thrust of these three distinct but interrelated policies was to stimulate economic growth

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<sup>1</sup>Spada provides an interesting account of certain individuals from the Italian peninsula who came to New France and later to British North America under a variety of circumstances. A. V. Spada, The Italians In Canada (Canada Ethnica, VI, Montreal: Riviera Printers and Publishers Inc., 1969), pp. 13-72.

<sup>2</sup>A. Margaret Evans, "The Italians In Canada" in Gianni Bartocci ed., On Italy and The Italians (Guelph: a publication of the office of continuing education, University of Guelph, 1972), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>The Canada Year Book, 1905, pp. 2-3.

and at the same time promote the cause of national unification.<sup>4</sup> Both the building of a transcontinental railway and the settling of Canada's huge empty lands required a very large influx of immigrants. Until 1896, however, and with the exception of intervals of a few years, Canada was afflicted by a serious economic depression which had been largely precipitated by a decline in world trade that began in 1873.<sup>5</sup> During this twenty-three year period of the Great Depression the volume of immigration remained low and although the Canadian Pacific Railway was built in the period 1881-1885, generally the Canadian economy remained static.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout these lean years Canada experienced difficulty in keeping its population at home as a substantial emigration flow to the United States of Canadian-born and of recent immigrants developed. It has been estimated that at the middle of the nineteenth century there were approximately one hundred and fifty thousand Canadian-born in the United States and by 1890 about one million. Lack of a significant

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<sup>4</sup>Donald Creighton, Dominion of The North--A History of Canada, Revised edition. (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1967), pp. 345-346.

<sup>5</sup>J. M. S. Careless, Canada A Story of Challenge (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1963), p. 268.

<sup>6</sup>Canada. Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1940), I, p. 52.

immigration into Canada coupled with the sizeable emigration was reflected in the slow **growth** rate of the Canadian population. While in 1871 the Canadian population stood at 3,689,257, two decades later it had grown only to 4,833,239.<sup>7</sup>

During the period of the Great Depression, Italian immigration to Canada was fairly low. According to Italian Government records in 1879 only 94 persons left Italy for Canada and only 45 the following year. Until 1899 the yearly number of Italians destined for Canada with the exception of the years 1886-88, was less than one thousand while during the three exceptional years registered 1,720, 1,632 and 1,347 immigrants respectively.<sup>8</sup> These figures of course do not take into account another source of Italian immigration, namely the flow of braccianti (day labourers) who crossed from the United States temporarily into Canada to work, particularly on the construction of railroads.

Many of these initial braccianti who had only recently arrived in the United States eagerly consented to be dispatched to distant work sites by private employment agents who collected a fee from each man they sent to work. Some of these early arrivals had little money and being unaware of the harsh climate of Canada, they came very ill

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<sup>7</sup>Creighton, op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>8</sup>Appendix B.

prepared. In the course of walking the great distances to remote work sites, some of them had to endure the extremely cold temperatures. In addition, they were ignorant of their geographical locations, since many of them were illiterate and further handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the English language. It was sheer determination, predicated by the necessity to work, that drove some to their final destinations. A letter written in 1884, by the mayor of Port Arthur to the consul-general of Italy, provides an interesting account of the difficulties which some of the original braccianti had to overcome:

There was a large number of Italians arrived here last fall and from what I could learn they were induced to come through the persuasion of employment agents in Buffalo and other points east. On their arrival they were in [Indecipherable] but were provided with provisions by the town authorities. Some of the party went east to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway a distance of one hundred miles from here, the balance left by the Sarnia steamer for Sarnia. I have not heard that any of them died from exposure but they must have suffered considerably. At the time there were [sic] no one here that could speak their language and consequently could not make themselves understood.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the initial few decades of the Italian mass immigration into North America, the logistics of moving the thousands of braccianti, unfamiliar with the English

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<sup>9</sup> Marks, Mayor of Port Arthur, to Consul-General of Italy, August 5, 1884. Thomas Marks Letter Books, 1884, p. 776, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society. The author is indebted to Dr. E. Arthur for having brought this letter to his attention.

language, from the United States to remote work sites of Canada were largely provided by a combination of two types of compatriots who played the role of intermediaries between the large employers of men, such as railway corporations, and various contractors. The two types of intermediaries who made their profession the task of supplying the contractor with an abundant supply of cheap Italian labour were known in the Italian colonies<sup>10</sup> as the "boss" and the banchista (immigrant banker). Among native Americans these middle men, along with numerous other Italian persons who catered to the needs of their compatriots, were commonly referred to as padroni, a term which in the context of its usage connoted at best unethical behaviour and even implied a relationship to criminality. Robert Harney has suggested that the application by native Americans of the term padrone to a variety of functionaries within the Italian colonies reflected their contempt for what the Americans considered to be foreign cultural elements.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>At the turn of the twentieth century and within the entire period of this study the contemporary norm in both Canada and the United States was to refer to city areas with a high density of Italian dwellers as "Italian colonies" or "Little Italy's". Seldom were such areas referred to as Italian communities as is the case today. This choice of terminology certainly reflected a lack of any significant immediate geographical and social integration.

<sup>11</sup>Associated with padronism were such Italian entrepreneurs as labour agents, saloon keepers, publishers of Italo-American newspapers, keepers of boarding houses, travel agents and contractors. Robert F. Harney, "The Padrone and the

In 1897 John Koren in his study for the United States Bureau of Labour, "The Padrone System and Padrone Banks", whose very title reflected the application of padronism to the Italian immigrant banker, asserted that while the padrone had found the milieu in the United States conducive to his mode of operation, he was however a distinctly imported European product. His guess was that the padrone was imitating the comorristi of Naples, whom he described as members of a powerful secret organization that made a living by extorting money from the peasantry. Koren also thought that another root of padronism was to be found in the regular practice by the Italian peasantry of giving of gifts in addition to the regular payments of fees to people that they considered superior to them in order to cultivate their good will.<sup>12</sup> From the point of view of native Americans, however, similar practices in the "Little Italies" came to be seen as synonymous with immorality and crime where numerous padroni exploited their compatriots.

Historically two types of padroni emerged in North America. These were the entrepreneurs who had engaged in the profession of indenturing Italian children in the wandering professions (as discussed in Chapter I) after the middle of the nineteenth century, and the others were indi-

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Immigrant," (unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, June 6, 1974).

<sup>12</sup>John Koren, "The Padrone System and Padrone Banks", Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labour, II (March, 1897), p. 113.

viduals who prior to the mass influx of Italian immigration into the United States, engaged in bringing men and women under contracts which generally lasted for a period of one to three years. Once in North America, the padrone sold their labour to any employer who was prepared to pay the most, and sometimes the women were even forced into a career of prostitution.<sup>13</sup>

Within the Italian colonies in the large centres of the United States the function of the two intermediaries, that is, of the "bosses" and of the banchisti, were complementary but distinct from one another. Usually the banchisti played a more extensive intermediary function, since aside from recruiting men when commissioned to do so by the "bosses", they also catered to the daily needs of the uprooted Italians in a number of capacities. The typical banchista was a notary public, a travel agent who landed money, operated a post office and for a fee would do any paper work that the numerous illiterate contadini could hardly attempt to do on their own. Naturally, ignorance of the English language also prevented them from dealing directly with North American institutions regarding their personal affairs. While the immigrant bankers were providing an essential service to their clients, they acquired an aura of evil as some of them were known to swindle their compatriots.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

At times they would escape to Canada or Italy with large sums of money that the poor contadini had entrusted to them to hold or dispatch to Italy.<sup>14</sup>

The "bosses" functioned in a more restricted manner. Their role was to seek large contractors who in turn would commission them to enlist an agreed number of workers. In cases where the "boss" could not contact all the required men personally, he would engage the services of the immigrant banker who then would post a notice in his office window advertising the available employment positions. The men who applied for the position would be briefed as to the terms of employment and the amount of bossatura that they were expected to pay to the "boss" for having obtained a job for him. This amount of commission varied, but in 1897 it ranged from \$1.00 to \$10.00 depending on a variety of factors such as the expected duration of the job and the supply of braccianti that were competing for jobs.<sup>15</sup>

Aside from this bossatura that the middle men collected, the boss would proceed to exploit his men in a number of ways. In arranging for transportation of the braccianti to the distant work sites, he would not hesitate to inflate the cost of transportation and pocket the extra

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<sup>14</sup>Martellone, op. cit., pp. 120-130.

<sup>15</sup>Koren, op. cit., p. 117.

amount beyond the costs of the fares. Later, at the work sites usually the contractor would give the intermediary the exclusive right to board the men and to operate shanty stores where the men would buy various supplies again at highly inflated prices.<sup>16</sup>

A case in point which outlined some of the contentious issues involved in the "boss" system was exposed by a bracciante, Raffaele D'Agostino, who was one of 175 Italian workers engaged on the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1886. Being resentful of the maltreatment he had received from the two Italian "bosses", Giuseppe Labriola and Mariano Nocerino who were in charge of the gang, D'Agostino proceeded to write an account of his ordeal and purchased space in an Italian language newspaper to have it printed. In his article D'Agostino levelled a number of charges against the "bosses".

Specifically, the bracciante claimed that the Italian "bosses" had swindled the men from the day they had left Chicago, as they had been compelled to pay them \$7.50 each for transportation on a steamboat from Chicago to Port Arthur, whereas the true costs of the fares had been \$2.00. At the work site, the "bosses" received all the incoming mail, and apparently Labriola made a habit of reading some of the letters addressed to the braccianti.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-118.

At the work site, where Labriola was responsible for providing the men's board, his men were forced to pay exorbitant prices, for the contractor deducted at source the claims made on the men's wages by the "boss". Labriola had even gone as far as using physical violence against some of the braccianti. Then when the work had come to an end, the "boss" retained an additional five or ten dollars from each worker. Finally, the "bosses" inflated the cost of the voyage from Winnipeg back to Chicago to \$25.00 when the actual cost was \$18.50 per person and, to make matters worse, the men were eventually returned home in a cattle car. D'Agostino concluded his article by stating that this "boss" had exploited the poor braccianti without any regard for their common nationality, and issued a warning to all his compatriots to be cautious of this sort of inhumane people "who would plunder even He who created them if they could."<sup>17</sup>

The accused who was determined not to let this column go unchallenged issued a reply in the press a week later. Labriola, addressing himself to D'Agostino's charges, explained that the fare from Chicago to Port Arthur had cost him \$4.00, only because he was able to get a discount in arranging the passage for the 175 men. Moreover, he

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<sup>17</sup>Chicago. L'Italia, November 29, 1886 (my translation).

chastised D'Agostino for having ignored mentioning that Labriola had to pay C. H. Wallow of St. Paul, Minnesota a \$2.00 commission per each man as a condition for giving the "bosses" the contract. Labriola also defended his right to receive some monetary compensation for his efforts and that the only difficulty rested only on how his earnings were labelled. He criticized that class of Italians such as D'Agostino who because of their ignorance of elementary business practices chose to label his monetary compensation camorra (graft). The "boss" praised the Americans for their extreme practicality and for honouring personal initiative and rightfully calling his monetary compensation a "commission fee". As far as the remainder of the charges went, he rejected them as being untrue, but did admit that he had indeed one day lost his temper with D'Agostino, as this worker was not taking his work orders seriously, and in order to put him to work he had given him a few punches.<sup>18</sup>

It is apparent from this case, however, that the "boss" expected a sizeable monetary return for his efforts and as much as he could extort from his men. As D'Agostino pointed out, the Italian middleman had felt no moral compunction for having taken full advantage of the situation in the name of profit, regardless of their common bond of

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., December 6, 1886.

nationality. The lack of any standard of morality in the exploitation of braccianti by the "boss", however conformed with the new unethical business atmosphere which characterized the so-called Gilded Age in the United States in the latter years of the nineteenth century. The Italian "boss" was no doubt conscious of the new spirit of enterprise due to his connection with the American railroad industrialists who were at the forefront of the new business atmosphere. These industrialists successfully accumulated vast fortunes often employing violent and corrupt business methods.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. The Influx of the Contadini In The Early Twentieth Century

The influx of Italian immigrants poured into Canada during the years prior to World War I. This period was marked by unprecedented economic expansion as the Great

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas C. Cochran and William Miller, The Age of Enterprise: A Social History of Industrial America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), pp. 131-132; De Santis suggests that the impressive growth of industrial capitalism which took place in the post Civil War years of the nineteenth century which gave rise to the so-called American Industrial Revolution, was in part made possible by the new class of industrialists known then as "Captains of Industry." Their ruthlessness and dishonesty in exploiting the workers eventually earned them the unflattering title of "Robber Barons." Vincent P. De Santis, et al. The Democratic Experience (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1968), pp. 248-249.

Depression of the late nineteenth century had come to an end by 1896. The aims of Canada's National Policy were at last realized, mainly due to changed conditions outside the Dominion. Primarily responsible for the economic boom was an increase in world trade. Particularly, as the industrial centres of Britain and western Europe grew, Canadian food-stuffs became much in demand. The European demand for grain gave impetus to the rapid settlement of the Canadian West. The improved market for agricultural produce coincided with a gradual end to the settlement of the agrarian lands of the Western United States and compelled the trek of settlers from Britain, from continental Europe and also from the United States to come further northward into the colder Canadian prairies which hitherto had had little attraction. Structural technological changes within Canada such as the completion of the transcontinental railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway had made agricultural settlement in the prairies viable.<sup>20</sup>

Within the Dominion, the rapid economic boom produced a feeling of unlimited expansion and an air of confidence.<sup>21</sup> At the political level, this new confidence was

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<sup>20</sup>Careless, op. cit., pp. 301-303.

<sup>21</sup>J. H. Hobson who visited Canada in 1906, commenting on the economic conditions of the Dominion wrote: "To visit Canada just now is a bracing experience for the torpid Briton. For Canada is conscious, vocally, uproariously

reflected in the Government's aggressive immigration policy, which was initiated by Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior in the Laurier Cabinet from 1896, when the Liberals took office, to 1906. Sifton's recruiting efforts were aimed solely at bringing into Canada immigrants who would take up farming in the prairies.<sup>22</sup> As Sifton stated in the House of Commons in 1902, the Government's policy regarding immigration had been for many years to induce agriculturalists and that under his administration this principle had remained intact:

The test we have tried to supply is this: Does the person intending to come to Canada intend to become an agriculturist? If he does, we encourage him to come and give him every assistance we can. But we give no encouragement whatever to persons to come here to work for wages as a rule. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Italian immigrants went against Sifton's goal as they overwhelmingly opted to join the ranks of the proletariat once in Canada.

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conscious, that her day has come . . . a single decade has swept away all her difference, and has replaced it by a spirit of boundless confidence and booming enterprise. J. H. Hobson, Canada To-Day (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup>Norman Macdonald, Canada -- Immigration and Colonization 1841-1903 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 267.

<sup>23</sup>Canada Parliament, House of Commons Debates, 1902, p. 2991.

By the late nineteenth century increased industrialization in Britain and Germany, Canada's traditional sources of immigrants, absorbed many potential would-be settlers. Canada had to look elsewhere in continental Europe for agricultural settlers.<sup>24</sup> Beginning with 1898, a general pattern of increased immigration to Canada became noticeable and this pattern developed with increased intensity between 1903-1914. Between 1896-1902, the average of the yearly immigrant arrivals stood at 43,074, whereas from 1903-1914 the annual average rose to 229,806. The peak year was reached in 1914 when a total of 400,870 immigrants arrived in Canada. In all, over three million immigrants arrived during 1896-1914.<sup>25</sup> It was during this period that as the influx of diverse peoples arrived Canada's ethnic character changed. In the late nineteenth century the bulk of Canada's population had been basically of British and French origin. In 1881 the population of British origin stood at 58.99 per cent and of French origin at 30.04 per cent. Of other European origins there were less than eight per cent of which the majority or 5.88 per cent of total population were of German origin. People of

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<sup>24</sup>Macdonald, op. cit., pp. 146-147.

<sup>25</sup>The Canada Year Book 1942, p. 153.

Asian origin numbered a mere one-tenth of one per cent.<sup>26</sup> In the two decades between 1891 and 1911 in part as a result of immigration, Canada's population increased by 49.1 per cent and in the decade 1901 to 1911 it increased by an astounding 34.1 per cent. In addition to the mere growth of population, equally important was the sudden shift in its composition. Within a single decade from 1901-1911, the foreign born population of Canada, excluding immigrants from Britain and the United States, more than doubled and in 1911 it stood at 6.23 per cent of the total population.<sup>27</sup> By 1941 the composition of the population had further shifted drastically. The population of British and of French origin had dropped to nearly eighty per cent, with 49.68 per cent and 30.27 per cent respectively, while the population of other European and Asian origins had risen to 17.76 per cent and 0.64 per cent respectively.<sup>28</sup>

Italian immigration to Canada developed in earnest during this period, 1896-1914. In 1899 Italian immigration to Canada reached 1,021 and 5,930 in 1905. From 1905 to 1914 the yearly Italian immigration

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<sup>26</sup>Canada. Statistical Abstract and Record 1886. Published by the Department of Agriculture. (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger and Co., 1887), p. 48.

<sup>27</sup>The Canada Year Book, 1948-49, p. 157; Census of Canada, 1911, II, p. 444.

<sup>28</sup>The Canada Year Book, 1948-49, p. 154.

to Canada always numbered over five thousand and over ten thousand came in the years 1906, 1907 and 1910. The peak years prior to the Great War were 1912 and 1913 when the numbers swelled to 18,991 and 30,699 respectively. In 1914 the number declined to 11,589 and dropped further between 1915 and 1918, as a result of the War situation, to a yearly average of 648. With the end of the hostilities in Europe, Italian emigration to Canada resumed, but did not reach the pre-War levels; for example, from 1919 to 1927 the annual average of persons emigrating to Canada was 4,159. Beginning with 1928 and throughout the economic depression of the 1930's, Italian emigration to Canada was basically halted as the annual average amounted to a mere 538 persons.<sup>29</sup>

At the outset of the twentieth century an Italian national, A. Benedetto De Paoli toured the Dominion with the aim of assessing the potential utility of Italian

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<sup>29</sup>These figures are based on Appendix B; Canada in August of 1930 passed an Order in Council which inevitably barred accessibility to the Italian contadini. Immigration into Canada was limited to British subjects and citizens of the United States who had adequate funds to be able to care for their needs until they had found employment. Dependants of immigrants were also allowed to enter the country provided that the sponsors could demonstrate that they had sufficient means to be able to support them. Also agriculturalists who had adequate sources to farm could come into Canada. Dominion of Canada, Report of the Department of Immigration and Colonization for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1931 (Ottawa: F. A. Arland Printer to the Most Excellent Majesty, 1932), pp. 7-8.

immigration into Canada.<sup>30</sup> In an eighteen page report De Paoli recommended that Canada could find an abundance of ideal immigrants in Northern Italy and particularly in the regions of Piedmont:

Le Canada trouvera incontestablement dans l'Italien du Nord le colon idéal pour la culture du sol et spécialement pour tous les travaux importants effectués en ce pays, et cela à raison des qualités multiples qui le distinguent, savoir; sa frugalité, sa grande résistance pour les travaux pénibles, sa simplicité, et sa soumission, son caractère constant et énergique, toutes vertus qui le rendent plus apte à exécuter les entreprises les plus, hardies; de fait, on peut l'utiliser à n'importe quel ouvrage se rapportant à l'agriculture ou à quoi que ce soit.

In addition to the variety of desirable traits that De Paoli attributed to the Northern Italians, he also stated that they had been accustomed to nearly similar topographic and climatic conditions as existed in Canada and that the harshness of the weather of the Alps had made them robust men.

As Canada was, of course, only actively seeking agrarian settlers, De Paoli suggested a few agricultural

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<sup>30</sup>Notes De Voyages Et Observations Sur Le Canada Recueillies Par A. Benedetto De Paoli a l'intention des Autorités Canadiennes et de tous ceux qui s'intéressent aux questions d'immigrations et de colonisation, Montréal, Janvier 1902. (Archevêché de Montréal); De Paoli was interested in establishing an agency in Canada to properly assist and direct Italian immigration. He suggested that this agency would be headed by him and that the Dominion and Provincial Governments provide an appropriate subsidy. For further details on De Paoli's scheme see report of L. O. Armstrong, Colonization Agent, Canadian Pacific Railway, Montreal, "Colonization Work Proposed To Be Done By Benedetto De Paoli." (Archevêché De Montréal).

activities for which the Northern Italians would be particularly well suited. He predicted that they could cultivate rice in Manitoba, and grapes for the establishment of a wine industry in Ontario. In every province the Italians could cultivate the mulberry tree which would lead to a Canadian silk industry. He was of the opinion that particularly in Manitoba the cultivation of mulberry trees could serve two additional functions, namely they would break the monotony of the empty fields and at the same time they could provide fire-wood. During the long Canadian winters, moreover, people would also be gainfully employed in spinning and weaving the raw silk. He also suggested that the immigrants from Piedmont would make excellent settlers that could engage themselves in the establishment of a goat industry in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia and in the Laurentian area.

An additional advantage of such a Northern Italian migration, according to De Paoli, was that politically they were not going to be a liability for English Canadians. He pointed out that while the Italians were brothers with the French who shared a similar religion, there also existed a tradition of close friendship between England and Italy. Moreover, as the current situation in Italy showed, the Italians were not going to intermingle religion with politics, and hence they would adopt a neutral position

in what he saw as the continuous dispute for supr matie between the French and English Canadians.

De Paoli's imaginative proposal failed to materialize. The majority of Italian immigrants entering Canada were not from the Northern regions as De Paoli had recommended but came from the Mezzogiorno. In 1908 J. S. Woodsworth estimated that eighty per cent of the Italian immigrants in Canada were from the South.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, while the influx of the Italian immigrants with an overwhelmingly agrarian background coincided with Canada's campaign to attract agricultural settlers, the number of Italians who became farmers or even agricultural workers remained insignificant.<sup>32</sup>

The magnetic attraction of Canada for the bulk of

<sup>31</sup>J. S. Woodsworth. Strangers Within Our Gates (Winnipeg: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1909), p. 163; In 1926 another observer of the Canadian population wrote that the majority of Italians in Canada had come from the Southern Italy. Kate A. Foster, Our Canadian Mosaic (Toronto: The Dominion Council of the Young Women's Christian Associations of Canada, 1926), p. 43; These estimates do reflect the statistical data of Table II of Chapter 1, which plainly shows that after the turn of the century the South had by far the greatest migration density.

<sup>32</sup>In the 1920's two small Italian experimental farm settlements were established. A settlement of about fifty men was launched in Ontario but subsequently failed, while a similar initiative in Manitoba was successful. Enrico, De Leone, "L'emigrazione italiana in Canada nei primi decenni di questo secolo." Italiani Nel Mondo (Anno 17, No. 9, 10 Maggio, 1961), p. 19; For a short account of the experimental settlement in the Trout Creek and Huntsville area in Ontario see Spada, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

Italian immigrants was not the prospect of acquiring a farm but rather working for wages in various construction projects in the booming economy of Canada and particularly in railway construction with a view to returning to Italy. Indeed, throughout the new economic era, railway construction became rampant as the amount of railway mileage in operation rose from 15,977 miles in 1895 to 34,882 miles in 1915.<sup>33</sup> And if we are to believe J. S. Woodsworth, the basic occupational pattern of the Italian immigrants was the pick and shovel:

The Italian laborer represents the Italians who are coming to Canada. Many have been accustomed to fruit-farming at home, and take up some kind of fruit business here. Few go into farming, though they have often excellent gardens. In the cities there are a few barbers, tailors, stone-cutters, etc., but the great majority belong to the pick and shovel brigade and are doing rough work in a new land. But the Italians are quick to learn, and many soon find places in factories and business establishments . . . Great numbers are employed on railway construction.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>The Canada Year Book, 1932, p. 535.

<sup>34</sup>Woodsworth, op. cit., p. 163; The great majority of the Italian immigrants were indeed of the labouring class. For instance of the 3,567 Italian males who arrived during the fiscal year ending March 31, 1909 there were 1,183 categorised as farmers or farm labourers, 2,069 as general labourers, 182 as mechanics, 33 as traders and clerks, 77 as miners and 23 were not given a category. Similarly out of a total of 394 females who arrived in the same year 45 were listed as farmers or farm labourers, 62 as general labourers, 19 as mechanics, only 7 as clerks, 2 as miners, 93 as servants, and 166 were not given an occupational category (and 267 were children). Canada, Sessional Papers, 1910, No. 15, pp. 12-13.

This occupational pattern persisted as Table V indicates, for both males and females. Although these statistics are based on a year when the economic depression of the 1930's had already put many persons out of work, nevertheless the data do indicate that the majority of the 31,780 males and 3,740 females of Italian origin gainfully employed were engaged in manual work.<sup>35</sup> Also the Table shows that relatively few, only 2,041 males and 30 females were involved in agriculture, out of whom only 954 males and 16 females were classified as farmers or stock raisers, 929 males and 14 females as farm labourers, and the remaining 151 males as gardeners, florists, and nurserymen and 7 males as foremen and overseers.

Since the Italian immigrants did not become farmers, this influenced their pattern of settlement in Canada. Until 1881 at the eve of Italian large-scale emigration, the majority of persons of Italian origin were in Quebec. Statistics show there were a total of 745 persons of

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<sup>35</sup>The following statement regarding the contribution of the early Italian immigrants is well founded. "In the early days one of their main contributions was the hard, backbreaking labour which they put into building railways, roads, canals, sewers, harbour installations and other construction projects which transformed Canada from a vast wilderness into a modern industrial state." Canada. Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Citizenship Branch, Notes on the Canadian Family Tree (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960), p. 76.

TABLE V<sup>a</sup>

PERSONS OF ITALIAN "RACIAL" ORIGIN, 10 YEARS OF AGE AND  
OVER, GAINFULLY OCCUPIED BY OCCUPATION AND  
SEX, IN CANADA 1931<sup>a</sup>

Occupation		Male	Female
All Occupations		31,780	3,740
Agriculture:			
farmers and stock raisers	954 16		
gardeners, florists, nurserymen	151 --		
foremen and overseers	7 --		
farm labourers	<u>929 14</u>	2,041	30
Fishing, Hunting, Trapping		69	--
Logging		174	--
Mining, Quarrying		2,552	--
Manufacturing		4,518	1,086
Electric Light and Power		351	--
Building and Construction		2,305	1
Transportation and Communication		2,554	39
Warehousing and Storage		172	108
Trade		2,753	593
Finance, Insurance		85	2
Service		2,652	1,288
Clerical		412	390
Labourers and Unskilled Workers (excluding those in agriculture, mines, and forestry)		11,126	199
Unspecified		16	4

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from: Census of Canada, 1931, VII, pp.  
430-443.

Italian descent in Quebec, followed by Ontario with 687 persons. By 1901 out of a total Italian population of 10,834, Ontario had the greatest number of Italians, 5,233, while Quebec's Italian population had risen only to 2,805, and British Columbia trailed third with an Italian population of 1,976.<sup>36</sup> This population distribution was maintained as these three provinces offered to a greater extent than others a combination of employment in labour-intensive economic activity such as general construction and manufacturing, and an urban environment. Ontario and Quebec seem to have best suited the Italian immigrants. Thus by 1931 the proportional distribution of the Italians in Canada was basically the same as had been in 1901. Ontario was still leading, with 50,536, Quebec 24,845 and British Columbia 12,254.<sup>37</sup>

It is ironic that as late as 1913 despite the absence of Italian immigrants in agricultural settlement an article, "Il Pericolo del Canada" (The Danger of Canada) was published. Since the author saw permanent emigration as a loss to the Italian state, he felt that unlike the United States where the lack of cheap agricultural land

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<sup>36</sup>The Canada Year Book, 1905, pp. 4-12.

<sup>37</sup>Census of Canada, 1931, I, pp. 710-721.

had forced his compatriots to become wage earners who eventually returned home with substantial savings and hence contributed to the Italian economy, in Canada Italian emigration was likely to be of a more permanent character. The author feared that the abundance of unsettled agricultural land in the Dominion would make it possible for Italian immigrants to become landowners and in the process of settling on the land they would lose their stimulus to want to return home.<sup>38</sup>

Various interpretations have been given why the contadini did not take up farming in North America. Foerster suggested that the Southern Italian migrants basic ignorance of the nature of North American farming techniques excluded the possibility of the contadino from engaging in agriculture in the New World. This assessment allowed Foerster to rationalize what he obviously observed:

From being farm laborers in old agricultural Italy, the transition is far easier to digging sewers in America than to independent farming.<sup>39</sup>

Spada has credited their memories of the oppressive and unprofitable nature of agriculture activities in Italy for having acted as a deterrent from taking up a similar occupation in Canada: "He [the Italian] is the enemy of

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<sup>38</sup>Vincenzo Porri, "Il Pericolo del Canada," Vita Italiana All'Estero (Aprile, 1913), p. 305.

<sup>39</sup>Foerster, op. cit., p. 372.

the soil which in return is his enemy."<sup>40</sup> These interpretations, however, do not take into account the prime reason why the contadino had journeyed to America. All along his strategy had been to earn some money and then to return home to purchase firstly a house and secondly his own agricultural land.<sup>41</sup> For the contadino then, his temporary

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<sup>40</sup> Spada, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the temporary character of the influx of Italian immigrants into Canada was clearly indicated by the disproportionately large male composition of the movement. Even as late as during the fiscal year ending March 31, 1912 out of a total of 7,590 recorded Italian immigrants entering Canada 6,211 were males, 799 were females and 580 were children. Canada, Sessional Papers, 1913, No. 18, p. 16; The transitory nature of Italian life in Canada was beginning to change into a more permanent character by the end of the Great War. "With the founding of permanent homes and the birth of children in Canada, Italian families were putting down roots in the new country." Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Notes on the Canadian Family Tree, p. 74; The temporary element however lingered in the "little Italies" of Canada throughout the pre-Second World War period as the male imbalance persisted. According to census statistics in 1911, out of a total of 45,411 persons of Italian origin less than one third or 10,760 were females and 34,651 were males. A decade later in 1921, the gap had narrowed indicating that the temporary character was slowly transforming into a more permanent one. Out of a total of 66,769 persons of Italian origin, now 39,722 were males and 27,047 were females. In 1931 the sex gap had further improved as there were now 55,141 males and 43,032 females. In 1941 although the sex gap in the "little Italies" had not been overcome, it had narrowed considerably as there were now 61,669 males and 50,956 females of Italian origin. Census of Canada, 1911, II, pp. 368-369; 1921, I, p. 358; 1931, IV, pp. 30-33; 1941, IV, pp. 4-5.

conception of his journey coupled with the desire for immediate monetary gains influenced him not to take up farming which implied a long-term commitment.

In conjunction with the Italian immigrants' quest for immediate accumulation of money for his labour, Dore points out that the contadini who came to North America had already acquired a semi-proletariat orientation as the meagre returns from the fields had compelled them also to work for wages in public works such as railroad construction and land reclamation projects. The agricultural classes including the small proprietors had come to appreciate an immediate and assured salary to unpredictable agricultural returns.<sup>42</sup> Given their proletarianization and common goal of planning to return home, agricultural activity in North America received little consideration from the contadini. They rather turned to labour-intensive pursuits for immediate financial returns.

Of course the isolated farms of rural Canada would only have increased the loneliness of the uprooted contadino as he had been used to live, particularly in Southern Italy, in clustered villages where he had been part of a complex community life.<sup>43</sup> It was thus under-

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<sup>42</sup>Dore, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>43</sup>Campisi makes the point that the Old World strong peasant-family life rested on an equally strong community culture. Paul J. Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family In The United States", American Journal of Sociology, 53 (1948), pp. 446-447.

standable that in North America, since the contadini had no initial intentions to become a permanent member of a new community, he was likely to prefer work in labour intense projects where he could be side by side with his compatriots who could offer a limited resemblance of his traditional social life. Edmund Bradwin observed in 1904 that the big railway gang had particular appeal to the Italian contadini as they appeared to enjoy the companionship of fellow compatriots where while mucking they could enjoy talking, laughing and singing.<sup>44</sup>

Fluctuating economic conditions and the regular shutting down of major construction projects during the cold winter months brought the thousands of Italian navvies to the crowded urban centres of Canada where the local authorities sometimes became alarmed. A critical incident occurred in Montreal during the winter and spring of 1904 when thousands of Italians were idle and in search for employment. To their rescue had come the Italian Immigration Society which had been established two years earlier in Montreal. Partially financed by annual subsidies of the Italian government, the Society made an attempt to offer some aid to the many

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<sup>44</sup> Edmund W. Bradwin, The Bunkhouse Man (Original publication 1928. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 110-111; In 1904 Bradwin went to work camps as an instructor of the then recently established Frontier College. Ibid., p. 14.

destitute braccianti who were eager to work. As the funds of the Society were soon depleted, it had to turn to the city government for additional funds. The public outcry which emerged against the unusually large number of Italians in the city prompted the Federal Government to appoint a Royal Commission headed by Judge Winchester with a mandate to inquire into immigration of Italian labourers to Montreal and into alleged fraudulent methods of operation of local employment agencies.<sup>45</sup> This official probe succeeded in determining the role of two Italian middlemen in the immigration of contadini to Canada.

Judge Winchester's inquiry was able to determine that throughout the winter of 1904 in anticipation of major construction undertakings that would be started in the spring by the Canadian Pacific Railways and the Grand Trunk Pacific, two Italian immigrant "bankers" of Montreal had launched a campaign to attract contadini from Italy and also from the United States. Alberto Dini and Antonio Cordasco were the

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<sup>45</sup>Canada: Royal Commission To Inquire Into the Immigration of Italian Labourers to Montreal and The Alleged Fraudulent Practices of Employment Agencies (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, Printer To The King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1905), (hereafter cited as Royal Commission To Inquire Into The Immigration of Italian Labourers); The Commissioner's report numbered 41 pages with an additional 170 pages of evidence taken. This report provides a great deal of information regarding the plight of the early Italian immigrants to Canada. The discussion on the findings of the inquiry is based on this report unless otherwise indicated.

two "bankers" but the latter held a greater degree of influence over the Italian immigrants since from 1901, George E. Burns, special labour agent of the Canadian Pacific Railway, had unofficially given him the exclusive right over the hiring of Italian labourers.<sup>46</sup> Basically the modus operandi of Dini and Cordasco in recruiting Italian labourers involved placing advertisements in two Italian-language newspapers which were published in Montreal, La Patria Italiana and the Corriere del Canada. Numerous copies of these newspapers along with advertisements and business cards were then sent to appropriate towns and villages in Italy where they were given exposure by private emigration agents who profited from the departing contadini. The ads in the winter of 1904 promised work for 10,000 labourers at good wages and of course they urged the potential immigrants to come to Montreal and to register with

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<sup>46</sup>Since the Canadian Pacific Railway was a major employer of labourers, Cordasco in his position of sole agent for the hiring of Italians, emerged as a powerful person within the Italian colony of Montreal. Recognition of his power over the economic life of the contadini was marked by a grande festa (great feast) which was put on in his honour by twenty-five Italians that he had hired as foremen on the railway gangs. At the feast held January 23, 1904, Cordasco was proclaimed "King of the Italian Workers" and an actual crowning took place. On January 27 the new "King" was further honoured with a parade and a fireworks display in which approximately 2,000 contadini participated. Spada, op. cit., p. 85; A photograph of the crown and of a petition in remembrance of the occasion which contains the portraits of the foremen and the names of about 1,000 supporters is found in Ibid., pp. 86-87.

the respective "banker" who would provide them with employment.

Cordasco who was the prime figure in this campaign had an added advantage over Dini in that he was the proprietor of one of the two newspapers, Corriere del Canada. In order to ensure that his ads gave the appearance of being genuine he had been cautious not to let the readers know that " . . . I am the capitalist and administrator of the Corriere del Canada." On February 27, 1904 his paper printed a lengthy article entitled "Italian Labourer" in which this "banker" was exalted as a benefactor of the Italian immigrants and of course a plea was made to potential immigrants to come to Montreal where they could be sure that this so-called philanthropist would offer them a job to work with the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was described as the world's most important rail company. As to the character of Cordasco the article stated:

What we say is not flattery, for we very well know that Mr. Cordasco, as a business man, does not care for that. It is only to sympathize with him for what he does for the Italian labourers who come here ready to fight against any kind of adversity, and who find in Cordasco a father, a friend, who not only helps and protects them, but puts them in a position to provide for their families and their aged parents.

Because many of the Italian immigrants landed at New York, Boston and other ports in the United States, Cordasco had his agents meet his incoming labourers at the different ports of entry to make sure that other labour

agents did not divert them from going to Montreal. These labourers had been provided with his business cards by agents in Italy and hence were easily identified at the ports. In addition to his recruiting efforts in Italy Cordasco also had agents operating in the United States who drew on the idle labour supply of the various Italian colonies. Indeed, the flow of Italian labour from the United States was significant. For instance, the Commission found that in 1903 the Canadian Pacific Railway alone had hired 3,144 Italian Braccianti, of whom 1,200 were from Montreal and the rest from the United States.

As far as the unusual influx into Montreal in 1904 was concerned, the Commission estimated that at least 6,000 Italian labourers had arrived and that many of them had been induced by the advertisements of the two employment agencies or "intelligence offices" as they were then also known, of Cordasco and to a lesser extent of Dini. An emigration official estimated that one half of the 6,000 Italians had come from Italy and the rest from the United States.

Evidence presented to the Commission suggested that Cordasco was far from being a benefactor to the thousands of Italians that went to his "intelligence office." His intense interest in Italian immigration had been based purely on business considerations which even extended to

outright extortion. Upon their arrival in Montreal, Italians who wished to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway were compelled to register with Cordasco who charged an initial fee of one dollar if they were in the labourer category, while the minority who were registered as foremen or as interpreters paid a ten dollar registration fee. Men testified that, while the men were waiting over the course of the winter and the spring for construction to begin, Cordasco had demanded an additional two or three dollar fee.

Cordasco's own testimony differed greatly from the accounts given by his clients. He admitted that from the beginning of November, 1903 to June, 1904, his office had registered sixty-three men as foremen of whom sixty had paid their ten dollar fee and that he had also registered 3,916 labourers of whom 400 had since paid four dollars each. In all he had received \$5,656 from the unemployed Italians:

The men paid me \$1.00 in December, \$2.00 in March; later on in June they came along and wanted to get registered, and they forced me to take more money.

Of course since Cordasco had absolute control over the hiring of Italians for such an important employer as the C.P.R., desperate individuals may have felt it necessary to pay him their last few dollars in order to guarantee later work. For instance, an individual who aspired to be among the first to be hired as a foreman,

had sent Cordasco a twenty dollar gift. On the other hand, men testified that Cordasco had personally demanded additional payments to the basic registration fee as prerequisite to getting a job. Then as the spring progressed and the anticipated work did not commence, some of the nearly destitute men requested their money back and were only answered with threats by the "banker".

In addition to his various fees demanded from the men, Cordasco was also receiving a salary of five dollars per day from the Canadian Northern Railway when he was engaged in sending men to their work sites. On top of his basic salary he had also been allowed to purchase the supplies that the men required for their journeys to distant work sites. Burns testified that ordinarily the Company would have provided these supplies to the men at cost, but Cordasco was adding a commission of approximately sixty-three per cent on the various goods. The men had little choice as to whether to pay this commission or not as Cordasco had the Company deduct his claim from their first wages. From June, 1903 to June, 1904 Cordasco had charged the men a total of \$6,453.41 for supplies, out of which \$3,800 represented his commission.

Cordasco's corrupt business practices were well known in the Italian colony of Montreal. The Italian Immigration Aid Society had made representation to the

Canadian Pacific Railway regarding his abuses and had offered to recruit Italians without any costs to the Company. Burns refused to accept this proposal. At the inquiry it was widely suspected that the special labour agent of the Canadian Pacific Railway had also been receiving a kickback from the immigrant "banker", although, they both denied this allegation. Judge Winchester described their relationship in regard to hiring Italian labourers as being "most intimate".

As a result of the Royal Commission the "banker" repaid the sum of \$2,017.25 worth of fees he had collected from the numerous braccianti that were still unemployed. At the Federal Government level, the inquiry prompted the introduction of a bill in 1906 which made inducement of labourers from abroad under false pretences a criminal offence.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1906, No. 14, p. 90.

### 3. The Dilemma of the americani in Canada

Generally, the americani<sup>48</sup> faced in Canada a hostile social environment. Their presence was resented by the native workers with whom they competed for employment.<sup>49</sup> Particularly at times of high unemployment, the arrival of the new americani would further flood the labour market leading to a deflation of wages as employers eagerly took full advantage of the situation. Officials of the Montreal Street Railway Company, and of the Montreal, Light, Heat and Power Company readily admitted to the Royal Commission in 1904 that the influx of Italian immigrants had made it possible for them to lower wages to their employees from \$1.45 per day in the previous year to \$1.25. J. B. Mack, Vice President of the Dominion Trades and Labour Congress also told the Commission that the sustained arrival of foreign labour aside from leading to a reduction in wages

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<sup>48</sup>In the Italian context, as previously mentioned in Chapter I when a contadino emigrated to North America he became known as an americano.

<sup>49</sup>The Trades and Labour Congress from its very first meeting in 1883 and throughout the period of the immigration influx made repeated pleas to the government to limit the influx of immigrant labour. Opposing organized labour's efforts were employers' associations such as the Canadian Manufacturers' Association who urged the government to even take steps to increase the flow of labour. H. A. Logan, Trades Unions in Canada (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1948), pp. 465, 483.

was responsible for the retention of long working hours. In his opinion the only beneficiaries of the arrival of foreign labourers were the capitalists or companies who employed great numbers of unskilled men.<sup>50</sup>

Immigrants from Southern Italy also found themselves at the bottom of the social scale at their places of work even though they performed the toughest jobs. At the numerous construction camps across Canada where thousands of americani along with immigrants of various ethnic groups were employed, the conglomerate of men Bradwin found were divided into two "semi-racial" categories of "whites" and "foreigners".<sup>51</sup> Within the construction camps the "white-men" occupationally were engaged in administrative work or positions which required skills and which were financially more remunerative. The "foreigners" were those navvies who were predominantly doing the heavier manual work. In the "white-man" category were the Canadian-born who were either French-speaking or English-speaking as well as the British and American immigrants. Other non-English-speaking immigrants, particularly Scandinavians and

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<sup>50</sup> Royal Commission to Inquire Into The Immigration of Italian Labourers, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

<sup>51</sup> The following discussion on the status of the americani is based on the views and observations of Bradwin, op. cit., pp. 92-110.

apparently sometimes also the Finns due to their "intelligence", "native ability" and other such merits were also considered "whites". The Southern Italian americani who, according to Bradwin were agile but physically small, performed the heaviest manual tasks that even seemd to be beyond their ability. Clearly in the "foreigners" category, they were to be found in the railroad industry in excavations, erecting huge piers, working in pits producing gravel and crushed rock for railway line foundations, working in large numbers with the back-breaking lift-gangs and on railway maintenance. In contrast, the Northern Italian enjoyed a better reputation than his Southern compatriots and his status was certainly considered closer to the "whites" than to the "foreigners". Bradwin described the Northern Italians as being physically bigger, literate, and usually semi-skilled. In the construction camps they were not engaged in mucking (digging ditches) as they usually worked as carpenters or handy men. Moreover, Bradwin himself thought that only the Northern Italian possessed the artistic, the versality and the passionate "instincts of his race."

Although Bradwin has stated that "semi-racial" concept of "whites" as distinct from "foreigners" applied by English-speaking workers was merely an epithet of convenience and that it did not connote a degradation of

the workers' nationalities, he did admit for those who were categorized "foreigners" the distinction was hardly pleasant. At the very least this "semi-racial" cleavage functioned as a divisive force which could only lead to the evolution of a Canadian working class characterized by hierarchy based along ethnic distinctions.<sup>52</sup>

While the americani in the construction camps were stigmatized as being "foreigners" regardless whether they were truly thinking of returning back to their villages or whether they had decided to make Canada their permanent home, their status in the urban centres where the majority of them resided had also come into question. The influx of the contadini occurred at a time when Canada in addition to being involved in the settling of the farmlands of the prairies was also concurrently shifting from a predominantly rural to an urbanized one.<sup>53</sup> During this period of rapid

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<sup>52</sup>Porter has suggested that initial cultural barriers of immigrants which stemmed from the inability to speak English or French coupled with alleged racial qualities of immigrants determined their original occupational status. The alleged racial qualities were then cemented into basic historical relations which gave perpetuity to a class system which bound members of the different ethnic groups to the occupational status of entrance. John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 66-69.

<sup>53</sup>In Ontario and Quebec where the majority of the Italian immigrants resided, the urban population had surpassed the rural population by 1914. The two categories were almost at a par. Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook,

structural transformation the Canadian-born now living in urban centres still retained an agrarian outlook.<sup>54</sup> The Canadian-born came to identify the "foreigners" and particularly the Italian immigrants as being the principal protagonists of the social problems which engulfed the sprawling towns and cities:

The most serious difficulties with the Italians are found in the congested districts of the cities; here they help to create slum conditions.<sup>55</sup>

During the massive influx of immigrants certain exclusionary provisions of the Immigration Act were being enforced. The purpose was to exclude persons such as the americani that were likely to add to the congestion of the urban centres. It will be recalled that Canadian immigration officials were solely preoccupied in recruiting immigrants that were likely to become farmers or farm labourers. Besides Great Britain and the United States, Canadian officials were actively making recruiting efforts in Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland, Sweden and Switzerland. Immigration officials also applied the existing regulations

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Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 2; In 1921 the urban population numbered 4,352,122 and the rural stood at 4,435,827. The Canada Year Book 1941, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup>Hobson, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>55</sup>Woodsworth, op. cit., p. 164.

with more rigidity when it came to the Southern Europeans and Asians who made their way to Canada without official encouragement. All Europeans were required to have \$25.00; however, in the case of immigrants coming from the preferred countries, where Canada was making recruiting efforts, the officials were instructed to relax the monetary regulation provided that the individuals could give proof of assured employment in agriculture. This relaxation was not, however, to be extended to immigrants who were coming from countries in which Canada was not making an effort to recruit immigrants, such as Italy.<sup>56</sup>

Not all public officials agreed with the policy to discourage Italian immigration. In his annual report for 1914 the Canadian chief medical officer, Peter H. Bryce questioned the wisdom of the official policy which was aimed at discouraging the entry of Italians and Asians. He pointed out that during the previous two years more Italians had been rejected than any other nationality, largely for failure to provide proof of possession of \$25.00; however, on a per 1,000 basis fewer Italians had been deported than any other nationality. Bryce noted that it was ironic that in the fiscal year ending March 31, 1914, the least desirable category of European immi-

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<sup>56</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1911, No. 25, pp. 68-70.

grants, namely the Italians, had only one in 706 persons deported. This ratio represented one-fourth the rate of deportation of the British of whom one in 149 were being deported. Bryce accounted for the high rate of deportation among the British immigrants by reference to their exposure to such institutions in Great Britain as work houses and dispensaries which had given them parasitic habits of pauperism and general expectations for public assistance. On the other hand the "ruder foreigners", the Italians, Bryce felt, came to Canada with no illusions, knowing that they must turn to self-help and mutual assistance as they could expect little sympathy or help from Canadians with whom they did not share a common language. Moreover, the chief medical officer stated that few of the Italians and Asians in Canada ever became insane and that they were unexceptionally healthy and moral:

Can it be a law in morals that the most unmoral races are the least immoral in those ethical qualities which bring them within the causes of deportation under the Immigrant Act, as pauperism, crime and disease?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Canada. Annual Report of The Department Of The Interior, For The Fiscal Year Ending March 31, 1914. (Ottawa: J. De L. Tache, Printer To The King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1915), I, pp. 170-181; The low rate of deportations and the generally excellent health of the Italian immigrants had been mentioned by Bryce as early as 1908. Then he had noted that since 1904 only one Italian had been deported as a criminal out of a total of 16,546 recorded Italian immigrants that had arrived. As to their health he then stated: "Evidently they are remarkably free from insanity and tuberculosis, and in the latter

Desirable traits of the americani such as their good health and self-reliance, however, were not in themselves sufficient criteria to make them desirable immigrants in the eyes of many English-Canadians whose ethos militated against their presence. By the late nineteenth century in English Canada an exuberant belief in the revitalization of the British Empire and a new zeal in Protestantism had emerged.<sup>58</sup> It is no wonder that against this background the great influx of European immigrants during the first quarter of the twentieth century was to cause alarm among English-Canadians. They feared that the arrival of the waves of non-Anglo-Saxons were posing a threat to the very survival of their civilization. Around the turn of the century many English Canadians had come to accept racial explanations to account for the progress which had occurred during the Victorian era. According to Berger, it had become both respectable and conventional to believe that the British constitution which had ensured democratic government and subsequently progress had been a product of racial attributions inherent in Anglo-Saxons. The concept

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cases this may be due to their outdoor life in sunny Italy." Canada, Sessional Papers, 1908, Xii, p. 135.

<sup>58</sup> Robert J. D. Page, "The Canadian Response to The 'Imperial' Idea During the Boer War Years" in Bruce Hodgins and Page, Robert, J. D. Canadian History Since Confederation (Georgetown: Irwin Dorsey Limited, 1972), p. 293.

of race as a historical agent was often used only vaguely as its advocates rarely defined it. Some, however, used the phrase "Anglo-Saxon race" to refer to acquired traits through cultural evolution, while others definitely were referring to biologically determined traits or instincts that were unique features of the Anglo-Saxon people. Amongst some of the more vocal advocates of this theory were those who were proposing a strengthened imperial unity with Britian. They dreaded the non-northern European immigrants because they credited their kind with contributing to political corruption in the United States and potentially undermining the leadership of the Anglo-Saxon people there.<sup>59</sup>

The attitudes which emerged among English-speaking Canadians toward the various incoming immigrants as outlined

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<sup>59</sup>Carl Berger, The Sense of Power: Studies in The Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 117, 147; An article entitled "Canadianizing the New-comer" which appeared in a national weekly publication warned Canadians that unless the flow of Southern and Eastern Europeans was halted they too would soon face the same fate that had afflicted their Republican neighbours: "Since 1882 the immigration flowing into the United States has changed from the progressive and enlightened people of northwestern Europe to those of the south and east. Nearly 80 per cent of the immigration of the United States consists of peasantry, scarcely a generation removed from serfdom, and comes from Austria-Hungary, Italy, Poland and Russia. More than one-half their total population is foreign born, and the very foundations of their civilization are threatened with destruction. The United States has long ceased to be British in sentiment or ideals. These are facts that Canadians should ponder seriously." The Canadian Courier, "Canadianizing the New-comer", December 6, 1913.

by Woodsworth in 1908, reflected their vaguely defined racial and cultural assumptions. The immigrants which were most preferred were those receptive to assimilation. The consensus was that amongst the most desirable immigrants were the British and the Americans. Next in the vertical category were the northern and western Europeans and included the Scandinavians, the Germans and the French who were thought to be assimilable. The Slavs and the southern Europeans were less desirable than their northern and western European counterparts. Lastly, Orientals, Negroes and Arabs were considered to be fully undesirable as it was assumed that they could never be assimilated.<sup>60</sup>

Not all Italians, however, were perceived as being of an undesirable quality. The contadini who came from Northern Italy were stereotyped as being tall, light in complexion, intelligent, literate and were thought of having a trade. They were considered to be very close to the quality of the Scandinavians and the Germans. The Southern Italians, on the other hand, were characterized as being short with dark complexion and generally of having a

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<sup>60</sup>Woodsworth, op. cit., pp. 58-189. For a comprehensive discussion on the evolution of Anglo-Canadian attitudes towards immigrants see, Howard Palmer, "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in The Twentieth Century", Multiculturalism as State Policy; Report of the Second Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism (Ottawa, 1976), pp. 81-118.

very low intelligence because of their having been descendants of a peasantry that had remained illiterate for centuries.<sup>61</sup>

Remarks made by a number of speakers on the immigration influx at the Presbyterian Pre-Assembly Congress which was held in Toronto in 1913 are indicative of the feeling of crisis which prevailed among some English-Canadians. Reverend H. A. Berliss of Toronto expressed his view that the "sturdy Protestant non-Anglo-Saxon of the evangelical type" who were arriving posed no danger to Canada. These people according to Berliss came with the benefit of a liberal conception of Christianity, a necessary prerequisite for spiritual as well as intellectual growth. On the other hand the masses who came from areas of the world where the Ecclesiastical despotism of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches predominated, he argued, were having an undesirable influence on Canadian social life. Their overcrowded and "filthy" residences coupled with alleged excessive drinking and "bloody fights" were sufficient manifestations of their undesirability.<sup>62</sup> Other speakers also stressed that the "foreigners" were a highly

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<sup>61</sup>Woodsworth, op. cit., pp. 160-166.

<sup>62</sup>Pre-Assembly Congress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1913 (Toronto: Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in Canada), pp. 127-130.

disruptive force since they were contributing to crime and were creating slums in urban centres where they settled in groups. To remedy this peril that was facing Canada the "foreigners" had to be both "Christianized" and "Canadianized".<sup>63</sup>

Attempts to proselytize the americani proved to be a very difficult task. By 1918 in the "front line trenches of New Ontario" a congregation of about 120 Italian immigrants had emerged in Sault Ste. Marie. Felix Cingolini a former Roman Catholic Italian priest who had joined the Presbyterian Church had been instrumental in establishing this congregation.<sup>64</sup> By 1925 only one additional congregation of 81 communicants existed in Montreal.<sup>65</sup> The major difficulty in the endeavour to proselytize the americani was a lack of missionaries who had a deep understanding of their culture and who could speak the Italian language.<sup>66</sup>

The urban bound americani were labelled by some

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., pp. 119-126.

<sup>64</sup>The Acts and Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1918 (Toronto: Murray Printing Company, Limited, 1918, pp. 26-27.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 1925, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 1923, p. 13.

native Canadians as "scum and dregs"<sup>67</sup> and had to bear with this lowly status to which they had been assigned. Within the slums or older districts of towns and cities the contadini settled along with the other "foreigners" where they carved a new life in their distinct "colonies".<sup>68</sup>

The emergence of the social distance as reflected in the residential segregation of the americani from the very beginning of their arrival was detrimental to the development of harmonious English-Canadian and Italo-Canadian social relations.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, at the beginning of

<sup>67</sup>The Canadian Courier, December 6, 1913

<sup>68</sup>The noted Canadian historian, Arthur R. M. Lower, assessed the evolution of Canadian society since the great influx of the "foreigners" in the following terms: "These newcomers had not been received into the bosom of the family. If they were Protestant in religion and Scandinavian, Dutch or German in origin, if they learned to speak English reasonably well, then they stood a chance of being taken in. English-Canadians had despised the French and used their strength against them when they could: they were not now disposed to admit 'Bohunks' and 'Dagoes' into any degree of intimacy. The newcomers were shoved off by themselves and settled in colonies or flocked into the slum areas of the cities." Arthur R. M. Lower, Colony To Nation -- A History of Canada (Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company, 1957), p. 425.

<sup>69</sup>When one considers the relative frequency of intermarriage for the different ethnic groups, one notes that the social segregation of Italians up to 1931 was considerable. Statistics show that by 1931 intermarriage had occurred to a greater degree among Canadians of North Western European origins, with 37.8 per cent of the married men and 37.6 per cent of the married women having married with mates outside their ethnic group. Next were those of Southern, Eastern and Central European origins of whom 18.4

the century English-Canadians had little knowledge of the Italians and of their aspirations. What they knew was based on rumours which could only foster great suspicion of the "Little Italies":

An Italian! The figure that flashes before the mind's eyes is probably that of an organ-grinder with his monkey. That was the impression we first received, and is difficult to substitute another. Italian immigrants! The figure of the organ man fades away, and we see dark, uncertain figures, and someone whispers, 'The Mafia -- the Black hand'.<sup>70</sup>

Over the years some of this suspicion was alleviated by the renowned ability of the Italians to work hard. Kate Foster, who was interested in improving relations amongst the peoples within Canada wrote in 1926 that the Italians were "excellent settlers" due to their thrift and industry which had allowed them to prosper. In addition their reputation had been enhanced as they were known to be temperate, moral and seldom had become public charges.

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per cent of the married men and 18.0 per cent of the married women had intermarried. Scandinavians had the greatest rate of intermarriage with 54 per cent of all the married men and 52 per cent of the married women having married outside their ethnic groups. With persons of Latin and Greek origin, 25.9 per cent of the married men and 11.8 per cent of the married women had intermarried. 78.0 per cent of the males of Italian "racial" origin had married a wife of the similar "racial" background, another 8.2 per cent married a mate of French, 5.0 per cent had married a mate of English background and 2.6 per cent had married a mate of Irish origin. The Canada Year Book 1939, pp. 159-160.

<sup>70</sup>Woodsworth, op. cit., p. 160.

Ironically, James H. Coyne, President of the Royal Society of Canada in writing a Foreward to Foster's book stated that a consensus existed in Canada to halt the "peaceful invasion" of the country by immigrants who were not readily assimilable and who possessed lower standards of life and lower ideals. The americani had hardly become acceptable it would seem, since the consensus reported by Coyne was to limit admission to the "Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, Scandinavian, and more northern Celtic races."<sup>71</sup> Despite this antagonistic attitude within the host society Italian immigrants sought to carve a meaningful life in the New World. By focusing this study on Fort William's "Little Italy" it is possible to get a glimpse of Italian immigrant life which is still largely unexplored.

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<sup>71</sup>Foster, op. cit., pp. 5, 43.

## CHAPTER III

### FORT WILLIAM'S "LITTLE ITALY"

As earlier noted, in moving from Italy to North America the contadini were urban-bound, settling in major industrial centres, from where those who could not be absorbed in local industries penetrated the continent in pursuit of temporary employment on construction projects such as railroads. Fort William, located at the heart of the Dominion, began to offer these employment conditions in the two last decades of the nineteenth century. Historically, Fort William was an important strategic trading centre for the North West Company's fur trading operation. Located on the shores of the Kaministikwia River, the canots de maitre, (or big Montreal canoes) stopped here with their cargo transferring it to smaller canoes that sailed up the river, thus effectively overcoming the difficult land route to the prairies. With the advent of the Hudson's Bay Company takeover of the North West Company in 1821, this water route declined in importance, but was not discontinued until the arrival of the railway in 1882.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth C. A. Dawson, "Underwater Search for Lost Fur Trade Goods in Northern Ontario", Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, Papers and Records, 1975, III, pp. 27-28.

When in the early 1880's rail shipments of western wheat commenced to reach firstly the harbour at the Kam-  
inistiquia River and soon after the waterfront of the  
nearby community of Port Arthur, the two communities were  
in the process of change from fur trading posts to important  
inland ports and centres of trans-shipments.<sup>2</sup> In its  
position as an inland port, Fort William's rapid economic  
growth, however, had to await the turn of the century when  
the wheat boom on the prairies stimulated an east-west  
trading flow. In this significant economic development,  
Fort William became the "spout of the hopper"<sup>3</sup> where the  
bulk of the prairie wheat was unloaded by trains into grain  
elevators to be cleaned and then re-loaded into vessels  
which carried it down the Great Lakes to points on the  
eastern seaboard. At the same time, ships on their way to  
get the grain brought to the harbours of both communities  
great quantities of coal and manufactured products from  
the eastern centres. These products were in turn unloaded

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<sup>2</sup>John R. Lumby, Historic Fort William, (Belleville, Ontario, Mika Publishing, 1974, original publication 1927), p. 23; Helen E. Carthy, "Port Arthur, Ontario: Its Industrial Development" in The Thunder Bay Historical Society, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Annual Reports--Papers of 1924-25, 1925-26, pp. 39-51; For an account of the rivalry which gripped these two frontier communities during their formative years, see Elizabeth Arthur, "The Landing and the Plot", Lakehead University Review, I (1968), pp. 1-17.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Quayle Innis, An Economic History of Canada (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1948), p. 237.

and shipped by rail westward. By 1903 coal handling had become a major industry along the waterfronts of these two communities. At the beginning of the shipping season of that year the local press proudly announced that the C.P.R.'s coal handling operations at Fort William were likely to be the largest in North America.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of the Italian immigrants to Fort William reflected in microcosm the general Italian emigration pattern to Canada, and equally, the developments in economic activities of the two communities. The census of 1881 showed that there were five persons of Italian origin of whom only one had been born in Italy. None were reported for Port Arthur.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the remaining two decades of the nineteenth century the arrival of Italian immigrants to the two communities, reflecting the economic depression of the Dominion, remained low. For instance, in the year 1889 only nine Italians, consisting of eight men and one child came to settle in the area.<sup>6</sup>

Under the difficult economic climate of the Great

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<sup>4</sup>Fort William, Daily Times-Journal, April 4, 1903.

<sup>5</sup>Census of Canada, 1881, I, pp. 296-297, 394-395.

<sup>6</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1890, No. 6. Annual Report of J. M. McGovern, Port Arthur Immigration Agent, December 31, 1889.

Depression of the late 19th century, the demand locally for labour was limited. For instance in his annual reports of 1895 and 1896, J. M. McGovern, Travelling Immigration Agent, noted that there had been only an occasional demand for railway and lumber labourers; and warned that " . . . it will not be advisable for immigrants of the labouring class to come here as they would not be likely to secure situations at remunerative wages."<sup>7</sup> Under these circumstances immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe began to trickle in to Fort William in only small numbers as a result of modest railway activities. For instance, when the Canadian Northern Railway passed through, a small number of foreign navvies who had worked on the line, settled in Fort William.<sup>8</sup> By 1901, however, acceleration of immigrant arrivals had

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1896, No. 13, Report of J. M. McGovern, Travelling Immigration Agent, Port Arthur, October 31, 1895; Ibid., 1897, Report of J. M. McGovern, Travelling Immigration Agent, Port Arthur, November 2, 1896.

<sup>8</sup>Thunder Bay Historical Society Archives, The Department of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church and the Board of Social Service and Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church, Report of a Preliminary and General Social Survey of Fort William (March 1913), pp. 3-4. This and an additional Social Survey of Port Arthur were prepared by Bryce M. Stewart who later in the 1920's became Deputy Minister of Labour. These two surveys provide a wealth of observations into the economic, political and social conditions of the two communities and for this reason they will be used extensively in this study (hereafter cited as Social Survey of Fort William, or, Port Arthur, 1913).

commenced as a result of the improving economic activity. Skilled and common labourers such as the contadini were experiencing no difficulty in finding employment.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from the moving of wheat and railroad construction, other industries emerged which required an influx of labour into the communities. In 1905 R. A. Burris, Immigration Agent at Port Arthur, reported that the building of the blast furnace, the coal and ore docks, roasting ovens, the three sizeable sawmills in Port Arthur, the lumber industry in general, the terminals of the Grand Trunk Pacific, and general construction had turned the two communities into a "great commercial centre".<sup>10</sup> It was this combination of railway construction and subsequently the local industrial activity which required strong backs and strong arms that attracted contadini to this area. For instance, J. Defeo's father, who came from Campania in 1898 found his way to Fort William while working on railroad construction in North-Western Ontario. Later he found employment at the coal docks and settled in the East End.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1902, No. 25. Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, July 13, 1901.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1906, No. 25. Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, July 13, 1905.

<sup>11</sup>Lakehead University Archives, Archive 186a, Jean Morrison's Labour History Casette Tapes (Tape No. 8): Interview with J. Defeo (b. Fort William, 1910), summer, 1972.

The rapid economic growth which took place in Fort William and Port Arthur during the first decade of the 20th century was reflected by an equally expanding population. Over a period of ten years, the population of the two communities grew from approximately 2,500 persons each to a combined population of about 35,000 in 1910.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenal increase in population came from three sources: immigration, migration from other parts of Canada, and natural increases. The increased opportunities for unskilled labourers had drawn among others, an influx of contadini to the twin communities. The Census of 1911 recorded a total of 710 persons in Fort William whose birth place was Italy and a total of 364 in Port Arthur: whereas the corresponding figures for persons of Italian origin in the 1901 Census were only 127 and 70 respectively.<sup>13</sup>

This rapid population increase which had been boosted by a massive influx of immigrants significantly altered the ethnic character of both communities. In 1880 prior to the influx of the Southern and Eastern Europeans, approximately 2,000 persons resided in Fort William. The

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<sup>12</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1911, No. 25, Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, March 31, 1910.

<sup>13</sup>Census of Canada, 1911, III, pp. 430-431, 434-435; Ibid., 1901, I, pp. 314-315.

community was fairly homogeneous, since the European inhabitants were basically British in origin.<sup>14</sup> In 1913, the population of Fort William was reported at 22,807 of whom 8,568 were classified as Canadians, 6,388 as British and 547 as Americans. The remaining 7,304 or approximately one third was composed of other nationalities.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, while in 1901 the first eight leading ethnic groups in Fort William had been in order of numerical superiority in the following: English, Irish, Scottish, French "Half-breeds", Austro-Hungarian, Indian, Italian; in 1921, they were, English, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, Italian, French, Finnish, Austrian.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Great War had halted the immigration flow for a few years, the Italian colonies of Fort William and Port Arthur, by 1921, numbered 1,342 and 698 persons of Italian origin respectively.<sup>17</sup> During the 1920's, a modest influx of Italian immigrants coupled with the natural birth rate among those who had already arrived increased the

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<sup>14</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, pp. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Census of Canada, 1901, I, pp. 314-315; Ibid., 1921, I, pp. 482-483.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 482-483.

Italian population in the two cities by 1931 to 1,642 and 923 respectively.<sup>18</sup> During the 1930's, immigration restrictions in both Canada and Italy, enabled only a few to come. Nonetheless, by 1941 the Italian colony of 1,902 persons constituted 6.4 per cent of Fort William's total population and ranked fourth numerically preceded only by those of English, Scottish and Irish "racial" origins.<sup>19</sup>

These statistics show a rapid increase in the Italian settlements of the Twin Cities, particularly during the first decade of the century. However, they do not reveal the extent of the contadini's contribution to local economic development. For instance, it has been estimated that as many as one thousand transient Italian workers would fluctuate in the Twin Cities according to the economic shifts of the economy.<sup>20</sup>

Fort William and Port Arthur came to depend upon the immigrants to meet the needs of an expanding economy. In 1910, in outlining some of the immediate industrial activities R. A. Burris optimistically predicted that

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 1931, II, pp. 426-427.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 1941, IV, pp. 464-465.

<sup>20</sup> Enrico De Leone, "L'emigrazione italiana in Canada nei primi decenni di questo secolo", Italiani Nel Mondo (Anno 17, No. 9, 10 Maggio, 1961), p. 21.

skilled and unskilled labour would continue to be in demand for many years in order to man the expanding local industries and to carry out construction works in the area. He noted that more men would be needed for the planned double tracking of the Canadian Pacific Railway, from Fort William to Winnipeg; and to construct the Lake Superior Branch of the Grand Trunk Pacific. The Canadian Northern was also planning to double track its line from Port Arthur to Sudbury.<sup>21</sup> All these intense labour activities inevitably drew to the area more elements of the "pick and shovel brigade."

The contadini in Italy learned of the economic opportunities of Fort William and the surrounding area through letters received from friends and relatives already settled in this area, and also by personal accounts provided by the visiting or returning americani. Two typical cases of this type of chain migration are represented by two early immigrants of Fort William, Michele Solatino and Angelo Toderò. The former came directly to Fort William in 1906 from a small village of the province of Cosenza in Calabria. He came here on the basis of correspondence from his brother who had come to Fort William after having

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<sup>21</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1911, No. 25, Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, March 30, 1910.

worked on railroad construction in Northern Ontario.<sup>22</sup>

Todero came to Fort William in 1911 when a paesano (fellow townsman) returned from Canada to his native village to secure a wife and once this mission was accomplished came back with six young men of the village who took advantage of the groom's previous experience in North America, and simply travelled with him to Fort William.<sup>23</sup>

Others found their way to the Twin Cities only after considerable travels across the North American continent in desperate search for employment. The Italian immigrant had to be prepared to work under varied circumstances and had to be flexible in adapting to different types of work. Above all he had to be extremely mobile. An appreciation of this flexibility may be gained by tracing the movements of Frank Ventrudo that eventually brought him to Fort William. Frank came from a small land-owning family from the small town of Orsara di Puglia in Campania. Emigration was not a strange phenomenon to either his family or to the rest of the villagers. His father had emigrated to America prior to 1893, at the time of Frank's birth.

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<sup>22</sup>Taped interview with Michele Salatino (b. Scalzate, Province of Cosenza, 1889), May 31, 1974.

<sup>23</sup>Taped interview with Angelo Todero (b. Province of Cosenza, 1892), June 13, 1974.

Later he had also made a return trip home and a second trip to the New World.

When Frank was a young man, everyone in his town was talking about making la fortuna (a fortune) in America. On March 29, 1912 Frank decided to test his luck and boarded a ship in Naples which took him to New York and proceeded to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he had two cousins. In Wisconsin he worked in a foundry where machinery parts were being made. He had commenced this job a day after his arrival. Then in July he went to work in a stone quarry, and later, in the mill where the stone was processed. In the autumn, when the mill closed, he went to Milwaukee and worked in a steel mill for a while. In the spring of 1913, he went back to work at the stone quarry. Later in the year, and for part of 1914, he and a friend started a short-lived business. They independently began to make bricks by hand. But then, a plant opened that made the bricks with a machine, and since they could compete no longer with automation their operation folded. In 1914, he and his friend went to search for work in Chicago where he was employed in a paint plant for a while. When that job ended, he and his friend bought a wagon and a horse and peddled fruit in Chicago's streets. This venture turned out to be unprofitable and they were compelled to return to working at another stone quarry, this time in Iowa. Eventually, in 1915 they returned to

Milwaukee and soon travelling in search of employment they found themselves across the Canadian border in the town of Fort Frances. Here they worked in construction, and in 1916, the quest for employment brought them to Fort William, where Frank first found employment in the construction of a grain elevator, and where he remained.<sup>24</sup>

What facilitated significantly the widespread travels of contadini was the network of connections of relatives or paesani that once in America maintained active communications with their people back home. A friend or a cousin in New York; Providence, Fort William or in a combination of such places provided an initial destination where an inexperienced immigrant could expect to be welcomed and given a basic orientation as to how best to go about making la fortuna in the new strange land. The duration of the encounter with the friend or relative was likely to be short when there was a lack of employment in the particular centre and vice versa.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Taped interview with Frank Ventrudo (b. Orsara di Puglia, Comperia, 1893), September 12, 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Another of the early immigrants to Port Arthur, Joe Baratta, had first emigrated to the United States in 1904 at the age of 19. After a few years he went back to Italy only to re-emigrate again in 1912. His destination was Providence where he had relatives. Unable to find work there he went to work in Colorado and arrived in Port Arthur the same year. Taped interview with Joe Baratta (b. Comperendo, province of Catanzaro, 1885), August 8, 1974.

The pattern of settlement, among Italians and other urban-bound immigrants was the same in Fort William as in any other North American city. These various national groups sought quarters in low-cost dwellings that were often located nearby industrial plants and factories where they sought employment. These unattractive places eventually became the neighbourhoods of the "foreigners". Thus, the "foreigners" found themselves in segregated areas first as a consequence of economic principles; and secondly because of their desire to settle among those of similar background.<sup>26</sup> In Fort William the "foreigners" took up residences within the shadow of their work sites in streets such as McTavish, and McIntyre of the "Coal Dock Section" which eventually became known as the "East End". This area had become the focal point of the community's industry as a result of the relocation there, in 1892, of the C.P.R.'s operational facilities from the Westfort area.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Charles M. Bayley, "The Social Structure of the Italian and Ukrainian Immigrant Communities, Montreal, 1935-1937 (M. A. dissertation, McGill University, 1939), p. 9; For a discussion on the development of Italian neighbourhoods in Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Robert F. Harney and Harold Troper, Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930 (Toronto: Van Nostrand, Reinhold Ltd., 1975), pp. 24, 28, 64.

<sup>27</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, pp. 3-4.

It was in the East End that the "Little Italy" of Fort William emerged amongst the other "foreigners" who were similarly attracted by the C.P.R. works and terminals. These consisted principally of coal handling facilities, merchandise or freight sheds, and required plenty of men to carry out the heavy work.<sup>28</sup> Italians were also to be found in the Westfort area, but in smaller numbers. The few initial Italian families there were mainly Veneti and Abruzzese; while in the East End the Italians were mainly Calabresi, Piemontesi, Abuizzesi, Apulions or Napolitani (from Campania) and Veneti. Generally, the bulk of "Little Italy's" population came from numerous villages of Southern Italy (excluding Sicily) and Veneto.<sup>29</sup>

By 1904, an editorial in the local press could claim, much like any other North American city or town of importance, that it also had "a corner set apart for the people of foreign birth". The article went on to say that every other city which had the labouring class from Southern Europe also had its "Little Italy" in a segregated area that was shared with other non-English-speaking immigrants.

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<sup>28</sup>"Evolution of the Coal Docks Section", The Daily Times-Journal, May 21, 1904.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Michele Salatino; Taped interview with Tony Fogolin (b. San Vito, province of Udine, 1894, arrived at Fort William in 1913), May 22, 1974.

The article gave no reasons why these distinct neighbourhoods had emerged, except that "it seems to be a natural condition of things that these people should segregate."<sup>30</sup> In Port Arthur as well, the immigrants lived in distinct areas of the city. The main "Italian Colony" was located in the area between Pearl and Bay Streets. However, some contadini also settled along the Fort William Road, in the general vicinity where Ontario Street and First Avenue come together.<sup>31</sup>

By 1912, "Little Italy" had acquired a substantial character, as two ethno-institutions had been formed by then. For the Italian immigrants, this meant that they could now experience some degree of organized social life. The first formal organization, formed in 1909, was a benevolent society: Società Italiana Di Benevolenza, "Principe Di Piemonte".<sup>32</sup> (This society will be discussed in detail in Chapter V). During 1911-12 an attempt was made by an Italo-American from New York to start an Italian

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<sup>30</sup>"Evolution of the Coal Docks Section", The Daily Times-Journal, May 21, 1904.

<sup>31</sup>Social Survey of Port Arthur, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Statuto E. Regolamento Della Società Italiana Di Benevolenza, "Principe Di Piemonte", Fort William, 1909. (Hereafter cited, Statuto E Regolamento). The writer is grateful to Mr. Oliver Facca, current President of the organization for having made this and other documents accessible to me.

language newspaper named L'Aurora Coloniale (Colonial Dawn), but from all indications the enterprise failed to materialize.<sup>33</sup> No copies of this newspaper can be found and the only written reference of it is its name registration in Desbarats 1912 directory of publications.<sup>34</sup> The failure of this newspaper is not surprising, since the size of Fort William's Italian population and its low literacy rate were not conducive to making such a publication viable. In 1912, however, the Italian population was sufficient in size to be able to sustain their own St. Joseph's Church, which was built at 700 McLaughlin Street in the very heart of "Little Italy". In previous years, the Italians of the East End had worshipped at St. Patrick's Church which was located on Donald Street, and St. Peter's Church (built in 1908) which was also located in the East End and which catered primarily to Slovaks, Poles, and Syrians.<sup>35</sup>

St. Joseph's Church, which a few years later in 1916, was renamed St. Dominic's Church,<sup>36</sup> immediately

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Michele Salationo.

<sup>34</sup> Duncan McLaren, Ontario Ethno-Cultural Newspapers, 1835-1972: An Annotated Checklist (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 97.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Michele Salatino; Lumby, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Reverend D. China, current parish

became known as the "Italian Catholic Church".<sup>37</sup> This informal name suggests that the "Italian Church" was perceived as being exclusively for the contadini. This perception was accurate as throughout the period of this study it was always an Italian-born or an Italian-speaking priest that administered the religious needs of the contadini and their offspring.<sup>38</sup> The Italian-speaking priests in meeting the religious needs of the inhabitants of "Little Italy" cushioned the immigrant's problems of adjusting to the new society. This church performed its traditional role and thus gave the contadini a sense of continuity of lifestyle. The priests conducted in their own language the various rituals such as mass, confessions, Christenings, marriage, funerals; and each year at Easter as tradition demanded, they visited and blessed the parishioners' homes. The modest traditional religious processions which had been so popular and grandiose in the small Italian villages were also carried on.<sup>39</sup> In

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priest of St. Dominic's Church, August 27, 1975.

<sup>37</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>The following are the priests that have served at this "Italian Church" since its inception: Crociata 1912-13; Sansone 1913-16, Capresi 1916-32, Murray 1932-47, Venti 1947-49, Valorosi 1949-52, China 1952 - present. Interview with Reverend D. China.

<sup>39</sup>Interviews, summer 1974.

Italy, these processions honoured Christ, the Virgin Mary, or any of the numerous saints, and were more than simply religious rituals. These events were also great social events in which the entire village participated. The modus operandi was to parade the appropriate statue around the town or village accompanied by a brass band, civic officials, and of course, a long line of followers. Moments of great excitement marked these events as explosions, ringing bells, and fireworks were introduced into the festivities which lasted well into the night.<sup>40</sup>

The impact of St. Dominic's Church upon the contadini of the East End was twofold: it made the need for integration, such as learning the English language, less urgent, and equally, it provided a point of orientation which maintained the link with the former village life. As a consequence, the latter assisted in the quick re-establishment of social cohesion amongst the members of "Little Italy". Familiar religion went a long way in combatting the feeling of being uprooted, thus reducing the tendencies leading to social disorganization. In the new community in which the contadini were strangers their "Italian Church" provided them with a familiar point of orientation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>For an interesting description of a typical procession in a small Italian village see Levi, op. cit., pp. 116-119.

<sup>41</sup>It is interesting to note that in the case of

It is not surprising then that an observer noted in 1913 that the "Italian Church" was well attended by men.<sup>42</sup>

Following the pattern that had been established both in Italy and in cities of the United States St. Dominic's Church first parish priest did not escape from the suspicion of sexual misconduct. Reverend Crociata during his short stay from 1912 to 1913 at the "Italian Church" was suspected of having had a sexual affair with a parishioner who too left soon after his departure.<sup>43</sup> This type of scandal was far from being a unique occurrence. In many Italian "colonies" in the United States such scandals were widespread and frequent.<sup>44</sup> In terms of social function,

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the Irish immigrants in Britain in the early years of the nineteenth century, according to Thompson, the priest in their midst gained status precisely since "he was the last point of orientation with their old way of life." E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), pp. 479-480.

<sup>42</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup>A number of early immigrants whom I interviewed in the summer of 1974 remarked upon this alleged misconduct of Reverend Crociata.

<sup>44</sup>Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church", Journal of Social History, II (1968-9), 240; This type of rumour was well entrenched in the outlook of the contadini of Southern Italy in particular. There, the abundance of priests (in 1899 there was one per every 370 persons) provided plenty of examples of corruption and immorality that became popular local themes of entertainment. Rudolph J. Vecoli "Chicago's Italians Prior to World War I -- A Study of Their Social and Economic Adjustment" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1962), p. 120.

while the "Italian Church" helped to maintain group solidarity, it did little to help the contadini cope with their new society. The role of the Church, judging from the numerous conversations and interviews, remained largely concerned with religious functions only, and did not assume any leadership role in the secular concerns of the parishioners.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the period of this study, the nucleus of Fort William's "Little Italy" remained in the East End. In 1918, for instance, the membership roll of the Principe Di Piemonte listed 169 members, and provided the addresses of 66 of them. The records indicate that the majority or 47 of these were primarily living in four streets: McLaughlin, McLeod, McTavish and McIntosh.<sup>46</sup> In addition, it is in this neighbourhood that besides the "Italian Church", the Principe Di Piemonte, other Italian institutions, including grovery stores and two consumer co-operatives (which will be discussed later), were eventually established. Even by 1942, the membership roll of the Principe Di Piemonte, which now recorded all the addresses of its entire membership

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<sup>45</sup>Father Murray was the exception to this pattern as during the depression of the 1930's, because of his wide circle of acquaintances with local employers, he often used his influence to find some temporary employment for Italians in economic distress. Interview with Tony Fogolin.

<sup>46</sup>Membership Roll, Società Italiana Di Benevolenza, Principe Di Piemonte.

of 176 men, clearly indicates that the East End was still the centre of "Little Italy."<sup>47</sup> As in 1918, their residential concentration was still to be found in four streets of the East End in which 55 per cent of the membership resided. There were 41 members living on McLaughlin, 27 on McTavish, 15 on McIntosh, and 14 on McLeod. The remaining 79 members, as is apparent from Table VI, were mostly dispersed within the streets just adjacent to the East End.

In Fort William the contadini did not find the loathed latifondisti, but they did find a stratified community. In his report, Bryce Stewart, describes the social order as consisting of three classes in 1913:

Like Fort William, the population readily falls into three classes: The wealthy class of early settlers who have grown up with the City, and the business and professional men; the Artisans or the skilled labor class; the non-English-speaking immigrant population, among whom the Finns constitute the aristocracy . . .<sup>48</sup>

The character of the district in which a particular national group resided was in itself indicative of the group's socio-economic status within the community. The better residential areas were populated by the wealthier class composed of people of British background who had acquired their wealth in enterprises such as real estate. The artisan class or

<sup>47</sup>Table VI.

<sup>48</sup>Social Survey of Port Arthur, 1913, p. 5.

TABLE VI

Addresses of the Members of the Principe Di Piemonte, for the Year 1942

Street or Locality	No. of members in specific area	Total
<u>FORT WILLIAM:</u>		
McLaughlin Street . . . . .	41	41
McTavish Street . . . . .	27	27
McIntosh Street . . . . .	15	15
McLeod Street . . . . .	14	14
McGillvary and Simpson Streets . .	6 each	12
Syndicate Avenue and Wiley Street .	5 each	10
North May St., McPherson St., McMillan St., Southern Ave., Gore St., Robertson St. . . . .	3 each	18
Alberta St., Edward Ave., Nipigon Ave., McKenzie St., Finlayson St., McDonald St., Heron St., .	2 each	14
Christie St., Ernestine Ave., Amelia St., N. Vickers Ave., Cummings St., King St., Mission indecipherable , Montreal St., Northern Ave., Pacific Ave., Dease St., Centre Ave., Box 9 West Fort William, Empire Ave., Alexandra St., C.N.R. Section House--West Fort William, E. Brock St., Moodie St., Brodie St., Caroline St., . . . . .	1 each	22
<u>PORT ARTHUR:</u>		
First Ave. . . . .	1	1
Dufferin . . . . .	1	1
R. R. # 1 . . . . .	1	1
TOTAL . . . . .		<u>176</u>

SOURCE: Membership Roll: Società Italiana Di Benevolenza  
"Principe Di Piemonte", Fort William.

skilled labour, predominantly made up of English-speaking people, lived in the area of Pruden, Finlayson and Heron. The "horde" of immigrant labourers, such as the Italians, Ruthenians and Russians who were largely engaged in railway construction and in freight-handling at the docks, lived in the coal docks and the Westfort areas. These areas were bordered by the railway yards and the port facilities where many of the immigrants worked.<sup>49</sup>

The natural physical character of the East End where the "foreigners" settled was at best "unpromising". Since it was almost at the same level as the waters of Lake Superior, this meant that it was a swamp area. But by 1904 the "foreigners" had made this swamp into a "habitable" area through hard work. Notwithstanding their work the East End was still far from being an ideal residential zone, and part of the reason for this was that the local authorities had shown little interest in installing proper drainage facilities.<sup>50</sup>

Continued neglect by the local authorities was credited with having further rendered the area a health

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<sup>49</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, pp. 8-10.

<sup>50</sup>"Evolution of the Coal Docks Section", Daily Times-Journal, May 21, 1904.

menace. The City Council in a front-page editorial in the local newspaper was accused of what was termed a "Crime of Omission In Coal Dock Section". Council was criticized for having long neglected the Coal Dock Section, and for even having shelved the 1903 recommendation of Fort William's Board of Health to improve the area. The Council was doing nothing to spare the residents of the area from being exposed to the filth that abounded in the gutters and streets. Many visitors to the area, the editorial asserted, were coming to the conclusion that to allow these conditions to exist amounted to criminal negligence on the part of the City Council.<sup>51</sup>

The physical character of "Little Italy" was further aggravated by the living patterns of the "foreigners". In particular these early Italian immigrants were living a very disrupted life. As in the rest of North America the local "colonia" was comprised mostly of men who had come for a temporary stay. For instance in 1911 of the total of 710 Italian immigrants in Fort William, 556 were males and only 154 were females.<sup>52</sup> These immigrants

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<sup>51</sup>"Crime of Omission in Coal Dock Section--Streets and Ditches in Filthy Conditions--All Schemes for Its Improvements Buried in Council--Menace to Health", The Daily Times-Journal, June 26, 1908.

<sup>52</sup>In Port Arthur, in 1911, there was a similarly male imbalance, as there were 281 Italian immigrant males and 83 females, Census of Canada, 1911, II, pp. 430-435.

were determined to live a very stringent life while in Canada in order to hasten their return back home with an adequate amount of money, or, alternatively to save enough money to bring over the remainder of their families.

There were other factors which for the sake of economic survival necessitated that the immigrant put up with crowded living conditions. When the influx of skilled and unskilled immigrants arrived after the turn of the century, the rapid population increase greatly inflated the cost of real estate. The hundreds of houses being built were hardly enough to meet the demand; thus the result was that "houses to rent cannot be had -- even rooms are held at a premium."<sup>53</sup> Also, since the majority of Italian workers were of the "pick and shovel brigade" type, they were employed only part of the year on a seasonal basis. For instance, Giuseppe Guarasci, recalls that, when he arrived in the autumn of 1912, he went to work on the construction of the railway line connecting Port Arthur and Longlac. This work lasted only a short spell until winter brought it to an end. During these three months of work he earned sixty dollars. Giuseppe sent thirty

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<sup>53</sup>Canada, Sessional Papers, 1904, No. 25. Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, July 21, 1903.

dollars to his family in Italy and kept the remaining thirty dollars for his needs. This amount had to last him until June of the next year when work would eventually resume.<sup>54</sup> For the Italian navvies, the norm was to sacrifice all comforts for the sake of their commitments to their families. When Giuseppe went to work on the railway in 1912 he was introduced at once to this lifestyle of personal austerity. He found that of all the immigrant navvies, the Italians in particular would provide their own lodging out in the work camps in order to save their earnings. They constructed log huts, covered them with mud, and made these structures their living quarters. Next, they would build an outdoor oven made of stones held together by clay. The men found it most useful to arrange themselves in groups of seven or eight to divide the sundry chores of preparing food, cutting wood, cleaning, etc.

In the early years of the Italian settlement as only a few of the men had their wives in Fort William, the majority became bordanti (boarders). Upon returning from the construction sites the men automatically would seek lodging with a family of a patrioto (fellow countryman).<sup>55</sup> This pattern became the norm.<sup>56</sup> Inevitably the system of

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<sup>54</sup>Taped interview with Giuseppe Guarasci (b. San Stefano di Rogliano, province of Cosenza, 1894), August 9, 1974.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Taped interview with Frank Ventrudo.

boarding created severe crowding, causing resentment and concern outside the "foreign quarter". The issue of overcrowding amongst Italians and other "foreigners" was raised by an article in the Port Arthur Daily News in 1912. The article credited the near-slum conditions in "Coal Dock" areas to cultural characteristics of the foreign population. These "foreigners" were thought to be in that predicament as a result of their traditional, transported European habits of overcrowding and because of their alleged frequent resort to intoxicants. "In other words", the article explained, "what the Britisher calls slumming is not slumming in the eyes of the foreigner."<sup>57</sup>

Stewart in his 1913 survey of Fort William found similar overcrowded living conditions among the immigrants. He explained, however, that overcrowding was predicated on the high rate of winter unemployment among the immigrants, the relatively high cost of housing, and by a desire on their part to save money.<sup>58</sup> For the immigrant who needed to accumulate money either to send for a brother or a wife, to improve his status in Canada, or to return to his paese as a triumphant americano, the difference in cost between

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<sup>57</sup>Port Arthur, Daily News, March 16, 1912, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup>Social Survey of Port Arthur, 1913, p. 4.

living in a spacious apartment or sharing a tiny room with a few of his countrymen meant either the retardation or speedy achievement of these powerful motivations.<sup>59</sup>

Stewart noted that Ward One of Fort William, which composed the entire "foreign district", was the most populated section of the city with a population of 8,384, representing over one-third of the entire city population. In a house-to-house survey of two blocks in the East End and one block in Westfort, Stewart found that the Ruthenians were the most numerous followed by the Italians, and a few Slovaks and Bulgarians.<sup>60</sup>

Stewart's analysis of the phenomenon of overcrowding was certainly accurate as far as the Italian immigrants were concerned. The contention in the Daily News article which charged that the "foreign" population had generally been accustomed to overcrowded living conditions was only partly true. However, it did not explain the practice of keeping boarders in one's house. While Carlo Levi's

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<sup>59</sup>Harney and Troper found that post-Victorian Torontonians also misunderstood this practice of immigrant families taking in bordanti: "Canadians misunderstood the reasons for crowding in the Ward. They saw moral laxity, sloth and clannishness where there was often a ferocious determination to improve one's lot in this country or the Old Country". Harney and Troper, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>60</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 6.

description of peasants' dwellings (as given in Chapter One) depicts entire families living in single rooms which were sometimes even shared by barnyard animals, there was a distinctive qualitative difference in the nature of the overcrowding as compared to the experience of the contadini in Fort William. In Levi's narrative all the dwellings were inhabited by members of the immediate family, whereas the practice of keeping boarders consisting mostly of strangers within a home was a major social adaptation in the new environment of North America. Therefore, the overcrowding in the East End due to the bordanti was not an imported social trait of the contadini. Actually the practice of keeping boarders caused a major modification to the structure of the traditional family institution of the contadini. Writings on the Italian peasantry and particularly on that of Southern Italy suggest that sexual jealousy was very strong and that the typical Southern male kept unrelenting surveillance over the women of the family against strangers. Social and recreational activities which involved contact of the sexes, such as dancing, were kept to a minimum.<sup>61</sup> Naturally, then, in the South the practice of keeping strangers in

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<sup>61</sup>McDonald, "Italy's Rural Social Structure and Emigration", op. cit., p. 447.

the home was unknown.<sup>62</sup>

In "Little Italy" of Fort William there were few families who did not succumb to this new dimension to their family life. Some husbands were simply too jealous to allow boarders in their households.<sup>63</sup> There is no doubt that the short and uncertain work seasons made the system of boarding an attractive or even necessary measure even at the cost of altering the ideal traditional family style.<sup>64</sup> Those who accepted to undergo this adaptation competed very ardently to retain their boarders. Bad feelings usually emerged between families when a family took in a boarder which had previously been with another family.<sup>65</sup>

The maintenance of boarders was a responsibility

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<sup>62</sup>An observer of the Italian immigrants of Milwaukee noted, too, that the practice of maintaining boarders was a new dimension which the traditional Italian family had adopted in America. G. La Piana, The Italians In Milwaukee Wisconsin--General Survey (Prepared under the Direction of the Associated Charities, 1915), p. 16.

<sup>63</sup>Taped interview with Filomena Truisi, (arrived in 1913 to join her husband in Fort William), August 15, 1974.

<sup>64</sup>In the parallel case of Milwaukee's Italian community La Piana found that the families with small houses were keeping boarders in order to offset the rental expenses, and not as a business. G. La Piana, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>65</sup>Taped interview with Joe Baratta.

of the womenfolk as they had to do the cooking and washing.<sup>66</sup> There were also some families who maintained a large number of boarders in their houses as a means of earning their entire livelihood. Julia Marchiori, recalls that her mother had in her house as many as twenty-four boarders. The men had their meals in a kitchen which measured 24 feet by 26 feet. They sat on benches rather than chairs.<sup>67</sup> Julia's mother worked very hard; she even had to bake bread for her family and the men in a wood-burning forno (oven) that was located in a shed near their house<sup>68</sup> in the East End.

There is no question that the Anglo-Canadian, in looking at the "foreign quarter" inhabited by the contadini and other new groups, would perceive an unhealthy, unpleasant and socially-demoralizing milieu. Stewart found that in Fort William, the most congested blocks were in the Westfort and East End sections. In a close scrutiny of the block enclosed by McTavish, McIntyre, McLaughlin and Christie Streets, he found there were forty buildings, of which three were used exclusively for stores, three more were vacant, and the remaining thirty-four were used as

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<sup>66</sup>Taped interview with Michele Salatino.

<sup>67</sup>Interview with Julia Marchiori, (b. Fort William, 1908), August 14, 1975.

<sup>68</sup>Interview with Rachela Cimone, (b. province of Campobasso, came to Fort William in 1920 to join her husband who had emigrated in 1911).

residential dwellings, which also provided space for two bake-shops and five stores. The survey revealed that people crowded into one-storey houses and shacks and in many cases such dwellings were also located on the lanes. Living conditions were made worse by the absence of adequate sewer connections and garbage removal. The survey showed that a total of 292 persons inhabited this block of which 200 were men, 28 were women, and the rest were children. The majority of 111 of them were Italian immigrants, followed by Ruthenians, Slovaks, Greeks, Bokowinians, Poles, Finnish and Roumanians. All the women with the exception of one who was a widow were married.

The majority of these women kept boarders since only 24 of the male population lived either separately or in groups and the remaining 149 were boarding with 22 of the women's households. The level of overcrowding differed from house to house. One dwelling of five rooms was found to shelter 18 Bokowinians. A house of nine small rooms was inhabited by 17 Greeks, while a six room house sheltered 17 Italians, and in another case, there were 13 Italians living in a house of 3 rooms. In some cases, however, these figures were even understated as Stewart noticed a certain reluctance on the part of the housekeepers to reveal the number of people that were sheltered in their homes. In visiting the dwelling of an Italian who claimed

that there were 10 persons living in the house, Stewart found that there were actually 14 beds. Another Italian dwelling which was supposedly housing 17 Italians was fitted with 21 beds.

Living in these dwellings was hardly an improvement from the huts that the contadini had known back home. Aside from being overcrowded, there were hardly any comforts at all. Only 22 of the dwellings had indoor water taps, two of which Stewart found to be inoperative, due to being frozen. Only three houses had baths, and eight had indoor toilets. In addition, the block housed two horses and two cows as well as an abundance of fowl.<sup>69</sup>

In a Sunday sermon in 1909 Rev. Dr. S. C. Murray of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Port Arthur articulated some of the concerns that the native-born had regarding the crowded conditions in "Little Italy". He told his congregation that under the existing living conditions in the East End it was not possible to shape this "raw material" ("foreigners") into a respectable citizenry imbued with Canadian ideals. The girls of "Little Italy" in his opinion would find it difficult to temper temptations, as under similar situations the best of persons would be overcome. He pleaded with his listeners to do something

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<sup>69</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913.

about this situation which facilitated immorality and social anarchy, and called upon the local authorities to take the appropriate measures to diminish the degree of overcrowding in "Little Italy."<sup>70</sup>

While the moral risks as expressed by Dr. Murray's sermon were real, at the same time the system of boarding with a fellow countryman induced social cohesion within the group. The home of the fellow countryman cushioned the tremendous difficulties of adjustment for the lonely male immigrant. In the boarding houses, and for little money, one was provided with companionship, familiar food, and even moral support by virtue of sharing an atmosphere with others who had similar problems and aspirations. Boarding houses also provided a setting for cheap entertainment. Forced to spend the long idle winters indoors, the groups of men would attempt to break the monotony by engaging in familiar card games such as briscola.<sup>71</sup>

Boardinghouses, located in the small surrounding districts, also provided invaluable service to the Italian navvies who passed through on their way to railroad construction sites. These boardinghouses of fellow countrymen were welcome stopping places for the weary enroute to

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<sup>70</sup>"Social Problem Which Demands Attention", Port Arthur, The Daily News, September 8, 1909.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Giuseppe Guarasci.

their jobs that often involved three days' walking. Joe Baratta recalls that when he was on his way to work at a railroad site in 1912, he was fortunate enough to procure an evening's meal and accommodation at a boarding house of an Italian family where his inability to speak English was of no consequence. The other function of these boardinghouses was to serve as recruiting centres for contadini. It was to such places that employers seeking strong arms and backs turned in search of eager candidates for the "pick and shovel brigade".<sup>72</sup>

The clustering of Italians in distinctive neighbourhoods and the sharing of quarters helped the contadini cope with their loneliness and speeded the resumption of a communal life within the group. These settlement patterns inevitably entailed relative geographical and social segregation, but the alternative would have meant being "up-rooted" and this they clearly rejected.

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<sup>72</sup>Interview with Joe Baratta.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONTADINI IN INDUSTRIAL CONFLICTS, 1902-1912

#### 1. First Lessons in Industrial Struggle, 1902-1903

The years between 1900-13 have been characterized as a classic period in Canadian (and North American) industrial relations because of the high frequency of labour unrest and violence. Underlying factors which gave rise to this unrest included the concentration of wealth by industrialist "Robber Barons" and widespread poverty amongst workers. Social disorganization also stemmed from the large-scale immigration.<sup>1</sup> This also was the time when two distinctive "Italian Colonies" were emerging in Fort William and Port Arthur. The contadini immigrants to the Twin Cities coming from a semi-feudal society and thus pre-industrial cultural background had little experience with industrial relations. An examination of the role of Italian workers in a number of strikes which occurred in these two centres will show that when provoked by unbearable conditions they engaged in fierce struggles.

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart Marshall Jamieson, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66. The Task Force on Labour Relations, Study No. 22. (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 1968), pp. 63-67.

Also an analysis of Italian workers' participation in strike situations will shed light on the process of Canadian industrialization and its impact on community relationships.

During this period Fort William and Port Arthur enjoyed rapid industrial development. For the contadini turned proletarians and for the "foreigners" in general who had come to do the rough heavy work such as freight and coal handling there was no automatic economic gain commensurate to the overall industrial growth. Rather, for the Italian communities that emerged during these years, their economic life was marked by constant conflict as the contadini struggled to squeeze from their employers periodic increases in wages and even to safeguard themselves against virtual expulsion from their place of work.

The Italian immigrants began to play a role in the industrial relations of Fort William and Port Arthur in 1902. Unfortunately not many details are known about these early strikes as the newspaper accounts are short. On the other hand, from the information that is available, it would seem that it was then the contadini received their first valuable lessons in the despotic modus operandi of their employers.

On July 2, 1902, a number of Italian and Finnish workers employed in the freight sheds and in the yards of the Canadian Northern Railway (C.N.R.) in Port Arthur approached management for an increase of their wage to 25¢ per hour. The company responded by immediately dismissing

the workers for having raised the proposition and the next day they had all been replaced.<sup>2</sup> This uncompromising attitude came at a time when the C.N.R. was facing a strike in its Winnipeg operations.<sup>3</sup> Following the firing of the Italians and Finns, local workers started a full-scale strike at the Port Arthur operations on July 5, 1902.<sup>4</sup>

Two days later the C.N.R. responded with two of its powerful weapons, namely, imported strikebreakers and armed men. A "gang of Italians" numbering forty men were brought from Montreal and replaced the strikers at the docks. At the same time the company swore in ten men as "special" policemen to prevent the strikers from interfering with the strikebreakers or the company's facilities at the docks. Presented with this quick and formidable response the strikers offered no counterchallenge.<sup>5</sup>

A year later at the opening of the 1903 navigation season once again Italian freight handlers employed by the Canadian Northern were the chief protagonists in attempting

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<sup>2</sup>Daily Times-Journal, July 3, 1902. The newspaper account does not state the current hourly pay rate.

<sup>3</sup>The strike in Winnipeg had commenced at the end of June. Ibid., July 2, 1902.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., July 5, 1902.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., July 7, 8, 1902.

to improve working conditions at the dock. This time the contadini were primarily interested in bringing an end to the irregular employment hiring practices at the dock. Company policy was to hire men on a daily basis for specific tasks such as moving cargoes from ships. Between the arrival of vessels, the dock workers were expected to remain idle and, of course, without pay. When on May 20th the workers took certain actions in protest, the local authorities read the Riot Act and arrested the leader. The exact nature of the workers' protest is not outlined by the newspaper account; it merely states that "The workers became quite ugly this morning . . ." <sup>6</sup> Apparently a crowd of Italian workers had to be dispersed from the docks by the police. Then they were given their pay and were immediately replaced by other workers and the one day strike was declared over. <sup>7</sup>

From these two short-lived strikes the Italian workers at the waterfront, twice defeated, could realize that their future relations with their employers would be one of hostility rather than co-operation. The contadini furthermore saw how they were easily replaced and prohibited from prolonging their strike by "special" private policemen and the local authorities. Nevertheless, within the next nine years

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., May 20, 1903.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., May 21, 1903.

the contadini longshoremen would come to challenge their employers three more times in 1906, 1909 and 1912.

## 2. Contadini, Violence and Reprisal, 1906-1907

By 1905, economic developments that had taken place in Fort William and Port Arthur led the Immigrant Agent, R. A. Burris, to conclude in his annual report that the two localities constituted a "great commercial centre" where great prosperity prevailed.<sup>8</sup> For the workers employed at the waterfront, this assessment was not quite accurate as little of the prosperity had yet to reach them. In an attempt to improve their plight two major strikes were staged, in 1906, one against the Canadian Pacific and the other against the Canadian Northern Railways (hereafter cited as C.N.R.).

On September 29, ten Italian freight handlers employed at the C.P.R. freight sheds on the outskirts of Fort William's "Little Italy" walked out without warning demanding an increase in pay. The next day they were joined by the rest of the workers which included Greeks and Hungarians. Their current hourly rate was 17½¢ per hour

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<sup>8</sup>Sessional Papers, 1906, No. 25. Report of R. A. Burris to the Superintendent of Immigration, Port Arthur, July 13, 1905.

and 20¢ per hour for day and night work respectively. They were also entitled to a bonus of 2½¢ per hour provided they remained until the end of the navigation season.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this period this bonus system which was made an integral component of longshoremen's wages was a source of serious irritation for the Italian workers. Since the employers hired their workers on a day-to-day basis depending on a fluctuating need, the bonus system served the function of maintaining available throughout the season, an abundance of labour. When work was scarce at the waterfront, freight or coal handlers were reluctant to accept work elsewhere since in doing so they would have to forfeit a considerable amount of bonus money which in essence represented a significant percentage of their hourly wage. This bonus scheme helped the employers of the handlers to have the flexibility that a capitalistic labour market allows. A. H. C. Pentland has noted:

. . . the employer is confident that workers will be available whenever he wants them; so he feels free to hire them on a short term basis, and to dismiss them whenever there is monetary advantage in doing so.<sup>10</sup>

While the issue raised by the Italian strikers was

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<sup>9</sup>Daily Times-Journal, October 1, 1906; Ibid., October 3, 1906.

<sup>10</sup>H. C. Pentland, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science (November, 1959), p. 450.

wages, there may have been an even more important underlying reason for their action. "Railways Plan to Shut Out Italians?" was how the Daily News broke the story in a front page headline on October 2. The News had learned from an informant with much experience in railroad affairs that the current strike had come about as a result of the Italians having heard that the C.P.R., the C.N.R. and the Grand Trunk Pacific were in the future going to do away with Italian labour altogether.<sup>11</sup>

The informant conceded to the News that the current strike would do nothing to prevent the companies from carrying out their plans against the Italians. He was certain that the C.P.R. had been considering this strategy for a few months. In place of the Italians for the 1907 season the railroads were apparently counting on an influx of "thousands of brawny English-speaking men and youths" from the "Old Country". These arrivals would allow the companies to give up their dependency on Italian labourers, "and none other than the Italians know their services are accepted for no other reason than that none else has been available." The informant went on to say that the companies would continue to hire other "foreigners" of "sturdy races" mainly Finns, Swedes and Scandinavians since they were thought to be order-loving

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<sup>11</sup>Daily News, October 2, 1906.

and permanent settlers and thus would make "The best of British citizens". The News suggested to the informant that his story may have been an orchestrated attempt in conjunction with C.P.R. officials to intimidate the Italian strikers in ending the strike. His reply was:

It could, but my information demonstrates that the determined attitude of the strikers is the result of their having received wind of the contemplated action of the railroads and they are now making a last stand. <sup>12</sup>

Events at the C.P.R. freight sheds did not go unnoticed by the C.N.R. freight handlers at the Port Arthur docks where at the opening of the navigation season a two-day strike had ended in defeat for the workers.<sup>13</sup> On the day following the start of the strike in Fort William, that is, on September 30, the Canadian Northern handlers walked out in sympathy when they learned that part of the cargo that they were unloading from a vessel belonged to the C.P.R. While the men walked out in sympathy, they wasted no time in appointing a six-man committee entrusted to press for increased wages. Their demands were that they be given an

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1906.

<sup>13</sup>A committee of six handlers which included one Italian, one Russian, and four Englishmen representing workers of their respective national groups were only able to obtain one small concession. On the issue of the retention of the bonus, the company would still hold it back until the end of the season, but if a man wanted to leave he would be able to receive it provided that management received ten days notice. Ibid., May 5, 8, 1906.

additional 5¢ and 7½¢ per hour for day and night work respectively and 7¢ per hour on Sundays. In addition, the handlers wanted to see the company's practice of retaining 2½¢ per hour bonus until the end of the navigation season discontinued.<sup>14</sup>

Determined to win, the strikers had taken the initiative to bring pressure to bear upon the C.P.R. by widening the conflict to a general strike. On the morning of October 2nd the strikers instituted a blockade of "Little Italy" and prevented workingmen from going to work in their respective places. Consequently, in the two cities about one thousand men, all "foreigners", were on strike, of whom about six hundred were freight handlers and the remaining four hundred were workers employed in the construction of public works such as sidewalks and the excavation of sewers.<sup>15</sup>

Developments on the strike site moved rapidly, culminating in a confrontation at one o'clock. The Daily Times-Journal headlined the day's events, "Shooting and Rioting Started -- New Men Coming to Take the Place of the Strikers are Fired on by Italians". In what had amounted to a small pitched battle, two strikers and one officer were shot when C. P. R. Superintendent G. Bury arrived from

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., October 1, 1906; Daily-Times Journal, October 1, 1906.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., October 2, 1906.

Winnipeg with a carload of men who were to have replaced the strikers. Approximately one hundred strikers armed with guns, clubs and revolvers converged at the freight sheds after they had learned of the arrival of the men from Winnipeg. The strikers had Bury in his private railroad car and the men who were in another car surrounded when Constable Taylor, chief of the C.P.R. police ordered the "dissatisfied foreigners" to go away. The latter opened fire and a short battle was waged. Before the shooting came to a halt at least two strikers were injured and Taylor had been grazed by a bullet. Throughout the violent clash Bury and the men remained out of sight in their car and suffered no injuries.<sup>16</sup>

Following the "rioting" the strikers or the "mob", as the press called them, gathered on McTavish Street while a delegation of two Italians who were fluent in English conferred with Superintendent Bury. Nothing came of this meeting as Bury's proposal was simply that the Company would consider their demands if they returned to work. At the announcement of this proposal by the two Italian negotiators, the "mob" rejected it with loud jeers and repeated that they wanted 25¢ and 30¢ per hour for day and night work respectively. Meanwhile, as the negotiations had been taking

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., October 2, 1906. An estimated one hundred and fifty bullets were fired in the short encounter. Ibid., October 3, 1906.

place, the C.P.R. freight sheds were transformed into an armed camp as additional armed men were hired by the C.P.R. to patrol the installations.<sup>17</sup>

Even though following the shooting the C.P.R. forces were increased by a dozen heavily armed civilians, and by local police, there was much anxiety in the community. Many believed that the situation warranted the intervention of the local militia or of regular troops that could be requested from Winnipeg. The impending threat of further violence was once again heightened when later, on the day of October 2, the C.P.R. brought from Winnipeg an additional four carloads of men to replace the strikers. Accompanied by heavily armed constables, Bury successfully led the new men to the freight sheds to commence work. In reaction the Italians refrained from engaging in a second shoot-out with the constables but they did demonstrate their determination to keep on fighting by shooting into the air.<sup>18</sup>

An agreement to settle the strike came unexpectedly on the evening of October 2nd following the shooting earlier in the day. The agreement was facilitated through the good offices of Mayor Rutledge, Councillor Morton and a young Italian interpreter, Bosco Dominico. Under the terms

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1906.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1906.

of the compromise the C.P.R. agreed to give the men a retroactive increase to the beginning of the shipping season of 2½¢ per hour for both day and night work.<sup>19</sup> Very grudgingly<sup>20</sup> the strikers accepted this compromise, thus ending one of the most serious labour disputes that had occurred in Fort William.<sup>21</sup>

In Port Arthur the degree of violence in the course of the resolution of the strike did not reach the Fort William proportions. While a committee of two Italians and three English workers directed the strike, it was the Italians who were at the forefront of labour militancy as they had been in Fort William. Here the aim of the Italian strikers was also to widen the area of conflict to a limited general strike.

On October 1st, the day following the start of the strike, a "mob" of strikers of various nationalities made its way to the Port Arthur C.P.R. station where across from it, Italian and other workers were engaged in the town's excavation and blasting operations. Once the strikers reached the site "in picturesque Italian the men were called upon to leave their work." Eventually a few of the Italian

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., October 3, 1906.

<sup>20</sup>Daily News, October 4, 1906.

<sup>21</sup>Daily Times-Journal, October 3, 1906.

workers left their work, and after repeated appeals and jeers " . . . the remaining Italians joined their howling countrymen . . ." The other non-Italian men remained at their work. It is difficult to determine whether the Italian excavation workers joined the C.N.R. strikers in order to display class or ethnic solidarity or whether their action was occasioned by fear. The News who adopted an anti-Italian stand credits fear as having been the determining factor. The strikers did not disperse before a police officer scuffled with one Italian striker and threatened to use a gun if the strikers did not disperse.<sup>22</sup>

The approach of the C.N.R. in combatting the strikers was similar to the strategy of the C.P.R. On October 2nd, notwithstanding a statement made the day before that the C.N.R. would not introduce outside men to break the strike, sixty-four men arrived on the C.P.R. train from Winnipeg. At the station the new men who were unaware of the strike were met by many of the strikers who informed them of the conflict. The new men who were of different nationalities, after learning of the strike from their respective countrymen, decided not to proceed to commence work at the docks. Instead they took their packsacks and started walking up town while the strikers loudly cheered them. Many of these

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<sup>22</sup>Daily News, October 1, 1906.

men who found themselves destitute were taken care of by Italians who made sure that none of them went hungry.<sup>23</sup>

The solidarity of the imported strikebreakers with the local men was a major blow to the company. At the same time its competitor in Fort William, the C.P.R. had settled its dispute. These two factors prompted the C.N.R. to offer its striking freight handlers a compromise similar to the C.P.R. formula.

The resolution of the Port Arthur strike without resort to the type of violence which was used in the C.P.R. freight sheds has been credited in part to the moderation of the British workers. Having come from an industrialized milieu, they favoured an orderly and legalistic approach to the protest.<sup>24</sup> Evidence suggesting that the English workers played a restraining influence can be found. For instance, on the day that the strike began in the Port Arthur sheds of the C.N.R., "the Englishmen especially tried their best to impress their associates with the advisability of committing no violence."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, since the imported strikebreakers never did reach the work sheds of the C.N.R. there was no need for an armed confrontation.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1906.

<sup>24</sup>Jean F. Morrison, "Community and Conflict: A Study of the Working Class and Its Relationships at the Canadian Lakehead, 1903-1913" M. A. Dissertation, Lakehead University, 1974, p. 70 (hereafter cited as "Community And Conflict").

<sup>25</sup>Daily News, October 1, 1906.

Partial success in the 1906 strikes which had been achieved mainly due to the militancy of the contadini was to cost them plenty of adverse reaction in the Anglo-Canadian community. Readers of the News on October 1st, were treated to an editorial which focused its attention on the Italian workers. The "foreigners" and in particular the Italians were not criticized for having made unreasonable demands but rather for having introduced tactics in their dispute which were contrary to the British mode of behaviour. The major concern, the editorial argued,

is the circumstance that among the strikers are a majority of foreigners, chiefly Italians, who are reported to have prepared to meet opposition to their demands at the point of the knife, the national weapon of the "dago." . . . To strike for more pay is the legitimate prerogative of any man or body of men. But for a community of British citizens to have to submit to the obloquy of insult and armed defiance from a disorganized horde of ignorant and low-down mongrel swash bucklers and peanut vendors is making a demand upon national pride which has no excuse.

All this was the result, the editor argued, of a lenient policy which the community had adopted in its dealings with Italians of a "baser sort". The editor predicted that the Italians were likely to turn the strike into a "guerilla war" and introduce stabbing and shooting men in the back as a regular feature in industrial bargaining processes.<sup>26</sup>

Editorial opinion on October 2nd was no less

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., October 1, 1906.

critical of the Italian strikers than it had been the previous day. Reminding the readers that Canada was a nation under the British flag the editor charged that the Italians were violating British law in defiantly assembling in "riotous" congregations:

It is only incidental that bodies of Italians, ranging in number from fifty to one hundred, may without fear, congregate in public places and openly assume an attitude of defiance to British law . . . . Self-preservation being the first law of nature it would be not advisable to offhand attempt by a peremptory command to compel a congregation of striking Italians to disperse. The nature of the Italian demands that he be not driven unless he is outnumbered.

Had the Italian workers a better understanding of British law, argued the editorial, they would have returned to work once the company had agreed to review their demands. Under the circumstances the editor stated that the C.N.R. was perfectly justified in following the C.P.R. strategy of importing constables and strikebreakers to its works. Finally, the editorial concluded that the Italian strikers were doomed to fail since, "the Italian makes the mistake of not realizing that the British method of conquest is not intelligent. It's a waiting game, and the Italian cannot or will not wait."<sup>27</sup>

This hostile editorial attitude towards the contadini

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., October 2, 1906.

which was initiated prior to the shooting at the C.P.R. sheds, could only serve to incite Anglo-Canadians against the Italians and make the issues involved in the strike insignificant. At the same time this type of opinion served to justify to the citizenry not involved in the dispute the employers' position of refusing to bargain and quickly introducing imported constables and strikebreakers.

The 1907 shipping season commenced with a blunt determination by both railway companies to shatter the gains that their freight handlers had won as a result of the strikes of the previous October. First came the news that, as had been rumoured during the strike, the C.P.R. was going to exclude Italians and Greeks from working at the freight sheds. Work for them would be limited to the track lines and construction camps. This action was being taken because of their militancy in the strike. Their places were to be filled by two hundred or two hundred and fifty Britishers who were being boarded at the rear of the sheds and "should trouble arise it is expected that the Briton will be more than a match for the Greek."<sup>28</sup> Along with British workers, Hungarians, Polish and Finns were included among the eight hundred men hired.<sup>29</sup> Next the C.N.R.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., April 30, 1907.

<sup>29</sup> Daily Times-Journal, June 11, 1907.

struck a blow at all its freight handlers when it announced that for the 1907 season the rate of pay for the handlers would be 19¢ and 22½¢ per hour for day and night work respectively disregarding the agreement which had ended the strike the previous year making provisions for wages at 22½¢ and 25¢ per hour.<sup>30</sup>

In response to the C.N.R. wage cutback, the British workers at the sheds proceeded to organize a longshoremen's union.<sup>31</sup> Before the union had consolidated its position, however, about three hundred men of various nationalities spontaneously went on strike on June 8. This action may have been provoked by the company's firing the day before of L. Torrey, a British freight handler who had been canvassing the men with the goal of establishing a union. Demands brought forward by the strikers included the reinstatement of Torrey, more regular work, and wages of 25¢ and 30¢ per hour for day and night work respectively.<sup>32</sup>

On June 12 the C.N.R. brought one hundred and fifty men consisting of Italians, German and a few British from

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<sup>30</sup> Daily News, May 4, 1907. It seems that the C.N.R. in lowering its wages was attempting to follow the C.P.R. wage scale since the latter during the strike of the previous fall had been able to end the strike with a smaller wage compromise of 19¢ and 21½¢ per day and night work respectively. Daily Times-Journal, June 11, 1907.

<sup>31</sup> Daily News, May 4, 1907.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., June 8, 10, 1907.

Winnipeg.<sup>33</sup> When these men heard of the strike on their arrival about one hundred of them joined the strikers even though many of them were "practically destitute."<sup>34</sup> On June 14 the strikers, realizing that they were not going to win, surrendered their demands in return for the mere promise that management would not discriminate against the men who had been active in the strike.<sup>35</sup>

At the C.P.R. sheds the "Britishers" and the "foreigners" who had replaced the Italians and the Greeks did not remain indifferent to the longshoremen's strike at Port Arthur. On June 10 the British workers started a walk out and were joined by the rest of the "foreigners" making wage demands similar to the Port Arthur strikers.<sup>36</sup> On the evening of June 11 at a strikers' meeting about four hundred handlers joined the recently established union of the Port Arthur workers.<sup>37</sup> This action was rather late as earlier in the morning the C.P.R. had already hired new

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., June 12, 1907; Daily Times-Journal, June 12, 1907.

<sup>34</sup> Daily News, June 12, 1907.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., June 15, 1907.

<sup>36</sup> Daily Times-Journal, June 10, 1907.

<sup>37</sup> Daily News, June 12, 1907.

men to replace the strikers. "Greeks and Italians Seem to Have Broken the Freight Handlers Strike" was the startling newspaper report of June 11th. It was even more ironic since the strikebreakers were the same Italians and Greeks who had led the strike the previous fall and who had consequently not been hired at the beginning of the 1907 season.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of information reaching the police,<sup>39</sup> the Italians and the Greeks who had been refused employment in the spring had not resorted to violence. They had accepted their plight and sought alternative employment.<sup>40</sup> While not resorting to violence they had mustered a great deal of resentment against the British workers who had replaced them. It is not surprising then that attempts to get Italian and Greek strikebreakers to join the strike failed. "The Englishmen, the Italian and Greek strikebreakers claim, had no scruples about going to work when they were shut out and they certainly do not intend to turn around and help them out when they are shut out."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Daily Times Journal, June 11, 1907. According to the News there were also some Finns who had taken the place of the striking "Britishers". Daily News, June 11, 1907.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., May 1, 1907.

<sup>40</sup> Daily Times-Journal, June 11, 1907.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., June 12, 1907.

The 1906 and 1907 industrial disputes of Fort William and Port Arthur clearly demonstrate that a heterogeneous work force greatly enhanced the employers' power of manipulation of workers. For instance by playing one or two immigrant groups of workers against another the C.P.R. was successful in winning the 1907 strike. For their part the Italians were both at the forefront of labour militancy and were also manipulated to act as strikebreakers.

### 3. Troops Intervene in "Little Italy's" Affairs, 1909

The defeat of the freight handlers in the 1906 and 1907 strikes had only added to their discontent and after a short two-year period, the longshoremen were once again on strike. In 1909 a strike at the C.P.R. freight sheds (adjacent to Fort William's "Little Italy") surpassed in scope any of the previous ones that had occurred in the city. While the strike lasted only six days from August 9th to the 15th, before it was over the conflict took on the character of a miniature civil war between the residents of the "foreign quarter" on the one hand and the C.P.R. "special" constables, the local police, the local militia, and some regular troops who arrived from Winnipeg. Once again as had been the case in 1906 and 1907, all of the "foreigners", the Southern Europeans, and in particular the

Italians and the Greeks were perceived as the instigators and the ones who directed the course of the conflict.

On August 9, without warning, six hundred freight handlers, most of them "foreigners", walked out.<sup>42</sup> This action was in violation of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907. The terms of the Act stipulated that in the transportation industry differences between employers and employees had to be referred for conciliation or arbitration to a Board of Conciliation and Investigation appointed by the Minister of Labour.<sup>43</sup> It is doubtful that the strikers who were ". . . very generally foreigners, and with perhaps few exceptions without more than the rudiments of education" were aware of this legislation. Leaders of the strike later advanced this position in defence of their action.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 9, 1909. The report of The Deputy Minister of Labour, F. A. Acland, states that 700 freight handlers were involved in the strike. The Labour Gazette, X, (September, 1909), p. 341.

<sup>43</sup>The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act or the Lemieux Act as it was known prohibited strikes and lockouts in certain key industries, such as coal mining, transportation and communication, before the grievances involved in a dispute were submitted to a three-man board. Neither party was necessarily bound by the board's recommendations. Brown and Cook, op. cit., p. 121; Logan, op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>44</sup>The Labour Gazette, X, (September, 1909), p. 343.

The strikers' monetary demands were that they be granted an increase from 17½¢ plus 1¢ bonus per hour for day work to 22½¢, and an additional 4¢ per hour for night work which currently stood at 21¢ per hour.<sup>45</sup> The 1909 wage scale was lower than it had been in 1906. This economic phenomenon must have placed plenty of strain on the lives of the handlers. According to Jamieson, during this period across Canada wages lagged behind prices in spite of the rapid expansion in the economy. In part, this economic imbalance was caused by the large labour supply which was the result of the persistent influx of immigrants.<sup>46</sup> Besides wages, the strikers were seeking the abolition of the bonus system and were demanding better treatment from their foremen.<sup>47</sup> Bosco Dominico, the principal Italian spokesman of the strike committee, made it known that in addition to the aforementioned grievances, the workers also wanted the C.P.R. to recognize a longshoremen's union which was in the process of being formed.<sup>48</sup>

The strategy of the men was to attempt to form a longshoremen's union and to resist the importation of

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<sup>45</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 9, 1909.

<sup>46</sup>Jamieson, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>47</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 10, 1909.

<sup>48</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 10, 1909.

strikebreakers.<sup>49</sup> On August 10, the morning following the start of the strike, the strikers began to patrol "Little Italy" armed with sticks and stopping anyone who gave the appearance of being a potential strikebreaker.<sup>50</sup> Signs of the company's determination not to give in to the strikers' demands came swiftly. That very day there were rumours among the men that the C.P.R. was bringing by a special train a few hundred labourers from Montreal to replace them. Also the strikers were able to surmise that these rumours were true when they saw that a number of freight cars were placed on a siding at the junction of the freight sheds and McTavish Street, thus creating a barrier between the strikers and the freight sheds. The strikers concluded that the freight cars were placed there to provide protection for a line of armed officers who would be protecting strikebreakers.<sup>51</sup>

While Fort William's mayor, L. L. Peltier, was attempting to negotiate a peaceful settlement between the strikers and the company, violence broke out. The immediate catalyst for the violence was the moving of thirty C.P.R.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., August 10, 1909.

<sup>50</sup>Daily News, August 10, 1909; A police search of the strikers in the evening of the start of the strike resulted in the seizure of one gun and the owner was arrested. Daily Times-Journal, August 10, 1909.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., August 10, 1909.

"special" constables who had been brought from Winnipeg to the sheds. On the morning of August 12 when the constables moved to the company's boarding house near the sheds, they were soon surrounded by angry strikers who believed that the new men were strikebreakers and not constables. A gun battle ensued.<sup>52</sup>

The armed confrontation was of about half an hour's duration of intense fighting. The C.P.R. men were driven back to the bunk-house. As the strikers were preparing to storm the house, they were dissuaded by the appeals of the local police who had just arrived at the scene. For a while however, the strikers continued intermittent fire regardless of the presence of the police who were urging them to disperse in the name of the King. While no fatalities occurred, at least fourteen men received serious injuries.<sup>53</sup>

On learning of the shooting the Mayor went to "Little Italy" to the scene of the clash where he read the Riot Act and called out the militia. One hundred and fifty men of the Ninety-Sixth Regiment took up positions at the outskirts of "Little Italy" and order was restored. Colonel S. B. Steele, who was currently visiting the area, took personal charge of the Regiment on the morning of the

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<sup>52</sup>The Labour Gazette, X (September, 1909), p. 344.

<sup>53</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 12, 1909.

violence and requested an additional seventy-five regulars from Winnipeg.<sup>54</sup>

A "war-time atmosphere" embraced "Little Italy". Groups of soldiers were conducting military drills and patrolled the area with orders to shoot to kill the strikers if necessary.<sup>55</sup> The presence of the troops with their fixed bayonets was part of a strategy designed to carry out a disarmament operation. Finding themselves surrounded by troops, the strikers had no choice but to submit to a personal search as all the exit points of the area were blocked. The police who conducted the search of the trapped strikers found a number of revolvers.<sup>56</sup> Following

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<sup>54</sup>The Labour Gazette, X (September, 1909), p. 344; The regulars arrived by a special train on August 13. Daily News, August 13, 1909. With the involvement of Steele, the strikers were confronted with a formidable military intervention. Steele lacked no experience in mounting military operations. He had first served with the military during the Fenian Raid in 1866. In 1873, he joined the N. W. Mounted Police and served until 1899, except during the Riel Rebellion in 1885 when he commanded the cavalry and scouts of General Strange's column and was involved in key operations of the campaign. Steele participated in the actions of Frenchman's Butte and as commander of the mounted force, he successfully led the pursuit and defeated Big Bear's band and the Wood Crees. After 1899 he then served as Commander of the Lord Strathcona Horse during the Boer War, and later as Chief of the South African Constabulary in the Transvaal. A short summary of Steele's career is available in Henry James, Morgan, The Canadian Men and Women of the Time, 2nd ed. (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1912), pp. 1057-1058; Also see his autobiography, Forty Years in Canada (London: Hebert Jenkins Limited, 1915). Unfortunately this work covers his life only up to 1907.

<sup>55</sup>Daily Times Journal, August 13, 1909.

<sup>56</sup>Daily News, August 13, 1909.

this systematic search of the strikers themselves, a second search of the houses of "Little Italy" was mounted. "The chief of police and four squads of five soldiers ransacked the residences and outbuildings for weapons and ammunition."<sup>57</sup> The search unearthed only about thirty revolvers and rifles.<sup>58</sup>

On August 13 the C.P.R. brought in French Canadian workers to replace the strikers. Soldiers kept the strikers at a distance from the new men.<sup>59</sup> At this point the mood of the Italians was one of rage:

All yesterday afternoon while the strikebreakers were being taken into the yards the Greeks and Hungarians and Italians stood around the lines of military with anger reflected on every face and muttering threats against the soldiers and those who had gone to the sheds to work. Many of these men own their own homes in Fort William and would find it inconvenient to leave so that the prospect of not being able to procure work again is none too pleasing.<sup>60</sup>

About fifty of the one hundred penniless French Canadians, having been made aware for the first time of the existing dispute, decided to comply with the strikers' wishes and walked away. In all, about two hundred men were working at the sheds guarded by as many soldiers,<sup>61</sup> and the unloading

<sup>57</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 13, 1909.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1909.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., August 13, 1909.

<sup>60</sup>Daily News, August 14, 1909.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1909.

of cargo was proceeding on a limited basis.<sup>62</sup>

Faced with such company determination backed with military protection, the strikers of various nationalities, managed to hold a "conference of all nations" in "Little Italy" to assess the situation. Italian, Finnish and other workers agreed that they would not return to work unless the C.P.R. would rehire all the men who had gone on strike.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, company officials had successfully managed to shift the focus of attention from the men's demands to the question of who had instigated the strike. They charged that the strike had been caused by Greek workers, but this assertion was quickly denied by Greek spokesmen who claimed that workers from all the nationalities, including British workers, had initiated the strike.<sup>64</sup> C.P.R. officials made it clear to the press that they would not agree to any settlement of the strike which would require their employing Greeks in any capacity.<sup>65</sup> In addition to the Greeks, C.P.R. officials declared that they were also not going to employ any longer at the sheds the Italians and Hungarians who they charged had been at

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<sup>62</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 14, 1909.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1909.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1909. There were two hundred Greeks out of five hundred handlers employed by the C.P.R. Daily News, August 13, 1909.

<sup>65</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 12, 1909.

the forefront of the strike.<sup>66</sup>

Commenting on the strike situation, General Agent R. Armstrong in blaming the Greeks, inferred that there might be some exception made for the "white Italians", that is Northern Italians:

The Greeks I blame mostly for the disorder. The big Italians from the north of Italy are our best men. They are called the white Italians. The little fellows from the southern peninsular are willing but weak. I have on our books plenty of these men  
. . . <sup>67</sup>

In the parlance of the time (as earlier noted in Chapter II) the concept of "white" was considered synonymous with Northern European and with being "Canadian".

On Sunday, August 15 at a mass meeting at the corner of McTavish and McIntyre Streets, the strikers listened to Mayor Peltier announce that he had an agreement in writing that the C.P.R. was prepared to accept all the striking employees, including the Greeks with the exception of individuals who the courts would find guilty of having committed violence. Secondly, on the wage question, the C.P.R. was prepared to accept the decision of a board appointed under the Lemieux Act. Nearly all the men present promised the Mayor that they would accept this formula and

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<sup>66</sup>Daily News, August 13, 1909.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., August 16, 1909.

would return to work.<sup>68</sup> Erroneously convinced that the C.P.R. had agreed to comply with their demand for 5¢ per hour increase, the freight handlers returned to work the morning of August 16. It was only after a newspaper reporter explained to some of them more precisely the Mayor's remarks did they realize that they had returned to work at the old pay scale. Even an Italian worker that had been born in the United States and was fluent in English had understood the Mayor to say that the company had agreed to grant the strikers the aforementioned increase. What the C.P.R.'s open letter which the Mayor had read to strikers had actually said was that it agreed to have the dispute investigated through the mechanism provided by the Lemieux Act.<sup>69</sup>

At the combined urgings of Mayor Peltier and the Port Arthur Trades Council, the Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King, commissioned on August 15, F. A. Acland, Deputy Minister of Labour to settle the dispute under the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. Acland arrived on the 17th, the day after the men had returned to work, and proceeded to appoint a Board. By August 26th the Board had been able to reach a conclusion to the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., August 16, 1909.

<sup>69</sup> Daily Times-Journal, August 16, 1909.

hearings and released a unanimous report. The report recommended an increase of three cents per hour making their wages 20½¢ and 23½¢ per hour for day and night work respectively and the abolition of the bonus system.<sup>70</sup>

Bosco Dominico told the press that all the longshoremen were dissatisfied with the new wage scale but that they had little choice but accept it.<sup>71</sup>

As for the brutal conditions which existed at the freight sheds, they remained undisturbed by the entire affair. The Board's inquiry had not even substantiated one of the strikers' grievances about alleged harsh treatment by some of the company's foremen.<sup>72</sup> The foremen were only one of the aspects of the ordeal of working at the C.P.R. docks. Every day it involved a virtual fight to get hired. The sad human drama began at the dock before daybreak when the hundreds of men showed up, hoping to be in front of the long line in order to get a "check" (a number) and be put to work.<sup>73</sup> In the long line both the weak and the strong would struggle or even fight to be among the lucky ones to receive a "check". On August 16 a

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<sup>70</sup>The Labour Gazette, X, (September, 1909), pp. 341-347.

<sup>71</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 26, 1909.

<sup>72</sup>The Labour Gazette, X, (September, 1909), p. 348.

<sup>73</sup>Taped interview with Giuseppe Zuliani (b. in Fiume, Veneto, 1888), June 4, 1974.

Greek striker, Macineo Diligines spoke to a News reporter on the working conditions at the sheds and made the following remarks:

But we should not have to fight to get the little checks. That is where I gotta my ribs break. In the crush. I was much strong when I come seven years ago but each season this fight for the little check it get harder. We should not have to fitta for a chance to work so hard.

Diligines continued to say that even more frustrating was the preferential treatment accorded to Northern Italians over the rightful place of Greeks and possibly over the Southern Italians:

I strike because we not all get treated alike. They hold out checks at another window while I fight to get at the regular place! I finda them handing out checks to them they like at another window. Then we say it is not fair and the man he say go to hell. Then we strike. There is not work for all. I fight to window and they tell me there are no more wanted but I see them hand out the little checks at another window to big Italian man big and strong he from the north. So we say again it is not right. I was so strong seven years ago that I always git in first but it is not so now.

When the clerk would have hired the number of men he thought to be adequate, the rest of the men would sadly go home or wait for other boats to arrive. In the evening a second struggle to get a "check" might be repeated and this was a way of life that required the acceptance of perpetual daily abasement.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Daily News, August 16, 1909.

Frustrated workers at times reacted to their misery by resorting to cruel fun against their fellows. One of their favourite schemes was for someone to tie the legs of an unsuspecting individual waiting in line. When the line of men moved forward to receive the "checks" the man would of course be unable to move and he would be left behind and sometimes lose his chance to get a "check".<sup>75</sup>

Once hired to unload a vessel many of the strong men would work eighteen hours straight until they were exhausted while others were forced to remain idle. Many also worked in other jobs during the day and worked at the docks at night. The "constant battle" to get a "check" was considered by the strikers to be one of the worst aspects of their work. The handler had to work until he literally was exhausted and then he had to get up to fight for his "check" the next day because no one knew when he could get hired again. Sometimes a few days would elapse between the arrival of boats and the men had to remain ready without getting paid. Thus the irregular hours and the "awful crush" experienced at the long lines were considered by the men to be the "crying evil of the dock work".<sup>76</sup>

In their attempt to improve the harsh conditions

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<sup>75</sup>Interview with Guiseppe Zuliani.

<sup>76</sup>Daily News, August 16, 1909.

at the freight sheds the "foreigners" and particularly the Southern Europeans became the object of prejudicial commentaries. In a letter to the editor of the News a local labourer stated that Canadians had little in common with "hot blooded-foreigners". He justified the C.P.R.'s low wage scale arguing that if they earned more, they would have simply sent more to their families in Europe and Canadians would be so much poorer. The letters concluded by inferring that the strikers were anarchists: "Here's wishing Canadians and white men always get top wages and confusion to secessionists and anarchists."<sup>77</sup>

The strike had also brought reporters covering it face to face with the poor living conditions within "Little Italy". Crowded dwellings and unsanitary conditions existing both within houses and on the streets were attributed to the imported habits of the "Latin races of Southern Europe." This front page article also asserted that the sleeping quarters of the "foreign quarter" were worse than their equivalent in the slums of Rome or Athens and that "Baths are practically an unknown quantity with the Latin residents of the district."<sup>78</sup>

Aside from criticism, and a small raise in pay the

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., August 23, 1909.

<sup>78</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 21, 1909.

1909 strike against the C.P.R. had brought little gain to the Italians. At the outset of the 1910 shipping season much to their disappointment, they found out that their activism in the previous year's struggle was going to cost them even more. Repeating its 1907 strategy, a statement on April 8 from the C.P.R. flatly announced that Italians and Greeks would no longer be given employment in the freight sheds.<sup>79</sup> A press report the following day suggested that the "white Italians" were not included in the lock-out but that only about "300 Greeks and natives of South Italy" would be affected.<sup>80</sup> Some confusion, however, persisted on this point as on April 14 Superintendent R. Armstrong told a reporter that all Italians were included in the lock-out.<sup>81</sup>

The C.P.R. policy of exclusion came as a surprise, and many thought that this threat would not be implemented.

Although there are many who thought that the railway officials would, when the navigation season approached, rescind their mandate not to re-engage the Greeks and "Black" Italians who were implicated in last year's rioting, there seems to be little foundation for such an opinion.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., April 8, 1910.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., April 9, 1910.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., April 14, 1910.

<sup>82</sup> Daily News, April 13, 1910. "Black" Italians, refers to Southern Italians.

A sign of the company's determination to implement its discriminatory policy was the arrival of C. H. Andrews, their chief secret service agent. When Andrews arrived in Fort William on April 13th he told a reporter that he was aware that the company's edict of exclusion and the presence of 350 imported men to replace the Italian and Greek handlers might be countered by the latter with a riot. He further assured the reporter that the company was now in a position to thwart any disturbances as it was well armed.

Yes, I know all about that trouble, but you can bet your life that they won't make as much headway as they did last fall. The police department of the C.P.R. is organized this year, and just now enough constables could be mustered to compete with a company of soldiers, let alone a bunch of foreigners who would not stop running if they saw a red coat walking down the coal docks streets. We don't anticipate any trouble, but should the Greeks and Italians start a riot we will be on hand.<sup>83</sup>

Intervention on behalf of the Italians and Greeks failed to get the C.P.R. to change its announced policy. The local Trades and Labour Council engaged H. Sanderson, their eastern agent, to discuss the matter with General Manager G. J. Bury, who steadfastly refused to entertain any thought of conciliation. Bury claimed that the company's

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<sup>83</sup>Daily Times-Journal, April 13, 1910; The new imported men were French Canadians that had been hired at Montreal. Ibid., April 15, 1910.

lock-out of the Italians and Greeks was going to be for the benefit of the C.P.R. and for Fort William as well.<sup>84</sup>

Besides having to counter the C.P.R. "special" constables in 1909 in order to prevent strikebreakers from taking their livelihoods the strikers had also to bear the brunt of the Canadian military. With such an ally the C.P.R. had little trouble in bringing the strikers to submission. Finally the contadini were made to suffer for the second time the humiliation of being refused employment at the sheds. While citizens blamed the Italians for ignoring British law<sup>85</sup> in their struggle, yet, no British article of law made any provision to guarantee their livelihood against the threat of strikebreakers.

#### 4. The Deprenzo Case, 1912

The last major industrial conflict prior to the Great War in which the contadini commanded the focus of attention occurred in the summer of 1912. While the setting of the drama was in Port Arthur, many of the contadini participants were from Fort William's "Little Italy" who commuted there daily to work for the Canadian Northern

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1910.

<sup>85</sup>Daily News, August 18, 1909.

Coal and Ore Dock Company. At noon on July 29 members of the Coal Handlers' Union, Local No. 319 went on strike. In the evening Italian strikers were involved in a violent encounter with a squad of city policemen, which left a number of men seriously injured and ended with the Riot Act being read.<sup>86</sup> While the violence involved lasted only two or three minutes, its ramifications for the Italians was longstanding. For two Italian men, the Deprenzo brothers, in addition to receiving a score of bullets in their bodies, it meant receiving a ten-year prison sentence which many rank and file labourers perceived as "vindictive justice".

Since its inception in March of 1911 Union Local No. 319 had been influenced by contadini both at the leadership and at the rank and file level. At its first official organizational meeting two of the officers elected by the nearly fifty men present were Italians; Mike Pento was elected President, and Nicolo Ciacco Treasurer.<sup>87</sup> Mike Pento was in many ways a typical Italian immigrant. Born

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., July 30, 1912.

<sup>87</sup>Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Archives. Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Local No. 319, Minute Book, March 18, 1911 (hereafter cited as Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Minutes). The name Pento appears spelt in different ways, such as Paanto and Pionto.

in 1878 in San Angelo, Avellino (but known locally as a Napolitano), he left his home town at the age of fifteen and went to the United States. Following job opportunities on railway construction, he made his way to British Columbia in 1904 and from there he came to Fort William and in 1905 moved to Port Arthur. Like many of his fellow countrymen, he had received no formal education.<sup>88</sup> Being a veteran immigrant who had acquired a working knowledge of the English language he was in a position to play a leadership role amongst his fellows who had little or no knowledge of English.<sup>89</sup>

Some evidence that many of the original rank and file members were also contadini is apparent in the minutes of the second official meeting of the Union. On this occasion following remarks made to the men by the President

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Anthony Pento (b. in Port Arthur, 1905; son of Mike Pento), July 30, 1976. Pento's leadership of the Union came to an end on December 7, 1912 when two new Italian workers were elected as officers. Frank Colosimo and J. Tiboni were appointed President and Secretary respectively. Then on April 6, 1913 the Minutes of the Union record that Pento was dismissed. "Mike Pento cast off the Union" is what the official Minutes record. Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Minutes, December 7, 1912; April 6, 1913. According to his son Anthony, Mike Pento had been induced by the company to accept a promotion as General Foreman. This step was taken since Pento had too much influence over his fellow Italians. The company hoped that as General Foreman he would divert his influence towards the interest of management rather than the interest of the union.

<sup>89</sup> The writer has not been able to locate relatives or persons who may have been able to provide some information as to the background of Nicolo Ciacco.

of Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council, the President of the Local, Mike Pento "Luterjoerated [reiterated] them [the] same in Italian . . . ." <sup>90</sup> Of course the official minutes do not record the names of the rank and file in order to avoid reprisals from the company. <sup>91</sup>

From its inception the relationship of the union with the employer had been one of hostility prompted primarily by repeated attempts by management to undermine the union's structure. When the union presented its first set of demands to the company in May 1911, the latter responded by dismissing both Mike Pento and the union's secretary, George Ross and a few other men. <sup>92</sup> N. N. Jorpland, the company's Superintendent refused to acknowledge to the press that the men had made any demands or that they had a union. <sup>93</sup>

In response, the union contacted the Federal Department of Labour to apply the Lemieux Act. The Department

<sup>90</sup>Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Minutes, March 28, 1911.

<sup>91</sup>At their first union meeting in order to maintain the membership as secret as possible the men were given a "pass word". Ibid., March 18, 1911.

<sup>92</sup>Daily News, May 11, 1911. Pento had worked for the Canadian Northern Coal and Ore Dock Company for four years. Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1911.

complied and by June 19 a Board of Conciliation and Investigation which had been investigating the dispute submitted a unanimous report outlining a one-year agreement that would expire April 30, 1912. On the question of wages, the men were granted part of what they had demanded. The company also agreed to reinstate the five men that it had dismissed in May and furthermore the men received an assurance that the company would not discriminate against union members in the future.<sup>94</sup>

A year later in the spring of 1912 during the course of negotiating another agreement for that year, Superintendent Jorpland sent a letter of dismissal once again to both Pento and Ross and stated that the company would no longer negotiate a contract with these union officers.<sup>95</sup> Jorpland's

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<sup>94</sup>"Report of Board in Dispute Between The Canadian Northern Coal and Ore Company, of Port Arthur, Ont., And Certain Employes, Members of Coal Handlers' Union, No. 319", The Labour Gazette, XII, (July, 1911), pp. 47-49. The men had wanted 32½¢ and 27½¢ per hour for boat work and dock work respectively. They also wanted time and one half for work after six o'clock and double time for Sunday and for work between midnight and six in the morning. Port Arthur Coal Handlers' Union, Minutes, April 25, 1911. The Board of Conciliation and Investigation granted the handlers 25¢ per hour for dock work and 30¢ per hour for boat work and a lower rate of 22½¢ per hour when the navigation season closed. Time and one half was also granted for work performed on Sunday and for overtime between seven in the evening and six in the morning. The Labour Gazette, XII, (July, 1911), p. 49.

<sup>95</sup>Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Minutes, April 1, 1912.

action apparently was in retaliation for one-hour strikes on two occasions during the 1911 work season which the company suspected had been incited by Pento and Ross and Nicola Ciacco the treasurer of the union who was also discharged.<sup>96</sup> When eighty rank and file union members were read Jorpland's letter at a meeting, they gave their officers a vote of confidence and resolved to "ask the Government to afford another Conciliation [sic] Board."<sup>97</sup>

On July 19 a three-man Board which the Minister of Labour had appointed on May 23rd rendered its verdict on the two basic questions in contention, the matter of wages and of the company's dismissal of union officials. This time the Conciliation Board, not having reached a unanimous stand, produced a majority and a minority report.<sup>98</sup> The majority report, which expressed the findings of the company representative and the Chairman Judge McKay was short and upheld the Coal Company's stand that the men be paid according to the 1911 pay scale arguing that the men's monthly wages were one-tenth higher than what their counterparts were being paid by the C.P.R. The only exception to the 1911 agreement was that the company would pay

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<sup>96</sup>Report of Board in Dispute Between the Canadian Northern Coal and Ore Dock Company and Employees", The Labour Gazette, XIII, (August, 1912), p. 132.

<sup>97</sup>Port Arthur Coal Handlers Union, Minutes, April 1, 1912.

<sup>98</sup>The Labour Gazette, XIII, (August, 1912), pp. 130-138.

25¢ per hour for dock work all year round.<sup>99</sup> On the matter of the dismissal of the union officers the report admitted that the Board had been unable to find any evidence that the two one-hour strikes in 1911 had been induced by the union's president, secretary or treasurer. Nevertheless, the report made no recommendations to have the officers reinstated but only stated the company's attitude:

The Company insists on exercising their alleged right to engage such employees as they may deem proper during the year 1912, and the three employees in question appeared to have secured employment elsewhere, one of them at least at equally satisfactory employment.<sup>100</sup>

The minority report submitted by Frederick Urry, a Port Arthur alderman,<sup>101</sup> who was representing the interests of the coal handlers on the Board, differed totally from the majority report. Urry's report urged that the handlers be granted an increase and pointed out that the claim of the majority report that the men were earning one-tenth

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 13.3. The handlers had demanded 32½¢ and 27½¢ per hour for boat and dock work and 25¢ per hour for winter work. Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>101</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 5, 1912. Urry had come to Port Arthur in 1906 from Birmingham, England. He had embraced Fabian socialism and had been a member of the Independent Labour Party before coming to Canada. Even though he was an architect by profession, he joined the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and actively promoted the cause of labour. Amongst other things, he held the posts of labour columnist for the Port Arthur Chronicle and local correspondent for the Labour Gazette. Morrison, "Community and Conflict", p. 98.

higher monthly wages than their C.P.R. counterpart was strictly due to longer work hours. As to the issue of the two one-hour walkouts which the handlers had undertaken in 1911, Urry found no reason to blame the union officers that the company had dismissed. The first walkout, he explained, was justifiable as it had occurred following a company announcement one evening that starting the next morning, only three men would be performing the work that up to then had been done by four men on each car. This abrupt change of policy had come shortly after the company had accepted the agreement of the 1911 Board of Investigation and the men had viewed this change as an obvious violation of their agreement and wanted an explanation. The second walkout had taken place also spontaneously when a union member was dismissed while working, but neither Pento nor Ross had been present.<sup>102</sup>

Unhappy with the majority report, the coal handlers went on strike on July 20.<sup>103</sup> Their picket line was set up at the corner of Second Avenue and Fort William Road, a strategic point which commanded the only entrance to the coal docks. This point was also adjacent to Port Arthur's

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<sup>102</sup>The Labour Gazette, XIII, (August, 1912), pp. 133-37.

<sup>103</sup>Daily Times-Journal, July 30, 1912.

"Little Italy". Over fifty strikers, the majority of them Italian, were manning this point determined to prevent strikebreakers from going to work. In the evening when a couple of men were attempting to cross the picket line to go to work, they were seized by the strikers and were being discouraged from proceeding to the coal docks by an Italian who was "flourishing a revolver" when Constable Silliker of the local police arrived at the scene. When Silliker attempted to arrest the Italian, five or six other Italian strikers drew revolvers and pointed them at the Constable. Disarmed, Silliker was allowed to depart.<sup>104</sup>

On learning of the incident Chief of Police Angus McLellan along with Silliker and three other officers went to the scene where they found a "mob" armed with clubs. Constable Silliker identified the striker that he had attempted to arrest but when two constables were proceeding to arrest him the man ran into the bush. The two constables then placed under arrest the "ring leader", an Italian simply known as "Tony the Shoemaker".<sup>105</sup> According to the newspaper account, in response to the arrest, the other strikers armed with clubs, sticks and revolvers went to the rescue of the "shoemaker" and a struggle with the police commenced. Blows of clubs and bullets were exchanged.

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<sup>104</sup> Daily News, July 30, 1912.

<sup>105</sup> Daily Times-Journal, July 30, 1912.

The casualty list following two or three minutes of violent confrontation included a number of serious injuries. Police Chief McLellan suffered a slight fracture of the skull and other head injuries caused by blows from clubs and a cut in the scalp from a bullet. Three constables suffered slight club and bullet injuries, and two Italian brothers Dominic and Nicola Deprenzo received serious injuries. Also an undetermined number of wounded strikers fled the scene and went into hiding. The Deprenzo brothers suffered the most extensive injuries in the ordeal. Dominic received seven bullets, one of which had "pierced his heart", while Nicola had been hit with five bullets and both his hands had been "shot off".<sup>106</sup>

The local press report of the violence attributed responsibility to Italian coal handlers only and to the Deprenzo brothers who were perceived as "ring leaders":

Eye witnesses of the riot say that the Austrians, Hungarians and Finlanders did not take any part in the trouble. All the shooting and wilding of clubs was done by a gang of from 25 to 35 Italians who were urged on by the Denico [sic] brothers.

When Chief McLellan was clubbed to the ground unconscious with a stick larger than a baseball bat two

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<sup>106</sup>Daily News, July 30, 1912; Daily Times-Journal, July 30, 1912. The names of the two brothers were not consistently spelt in the various newspaper reports. Their first and last name appeared in various forms such as Denico and Nickola Dorazo.

Hungarians rushed to his aid and cried out, "Oh, our good chief is killed!" Denico got the first clout at the chief and when he was down the brother landed two more blows just as the Hungarians interfered. The ring leaders retreated but not before they were fairly perforated with bullets, which for a period of two or three minutes were flying in all directions.<sup>107</sup>

News of the violent drama that had unfolded at the entrance to the coal docks reached Mayor Ray of Port Arthur who quickly summoned the Ninety-Sixth Regiment and made his way to the scene where he read the Riot Act.<sup>108</sup> Ironically, sketchy news of the violence also reached the remainder of the strikers who were meeting elsewhere in the Finn Hall in preparation for a parade which proceeded through the principal streets of Port Arthur and was headed by an "Italian band."<sup>109</sup> The procession was composed of over one hundred and fifty socialists and labour men including a labour activist, Madison Hicks.<sup>110</sup> When the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., July 30, 1912.

<sup>108</sup> Daily News, July 30, 1912.

<sup>109</sup> This writer has not been able to find any additional information regarding the existence of an Italian band in Port Arthur at that time. It is likely, however, that the band was organized by Ralph Colosimo who immigrated to Fort William in 1907 and who later conducted an Italian band in Fort William's East End. Additional information about Ralph Colosimo's contribution to music at the Twin Cities is provided in Chapter V.

<sup>110</sup> The Journal on August 2nd provided an interesting profile of Hicks. Before coming to Fort William he had spent a few months in Brantford and Hamilton, Ontario in 1911.

parade came to a halt, speeches were made and were translated into Italian "warning the men against using violence in striving for their rights."<sup>111</sup> Needless to say these remarks were too late. Hicks was charged on August 2, with having taken part in an unlawful assemblage and for having headed this parade. Even though the parade had been nowhere near the scene of the violence the Magistrate upheld the interpretation of the prosecutor's witnesses which included Mayor Ray of Port Arthur, Colonel Little of the Ninety-Sixth Regiment and a police constable involved in the shooting, who testified that the assemblage had constituted a menace to law and order. Speaking in his defence, Hicks condemned the Italians for the violent incident stating that he was against "mob rule". Furthermore had he been at the scene at the time of the confrontation he would have sided with the police squad.<sup>112</sup> The contadini were thus abandoned by a socialist organizer and a former ally of their cause.

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There he had claimed to be a minister of the Gospel and expounded "socialistic and semi-religious" political ideas. Daily Times-Journal, August 2, 1912.

<sup>111</sup>Daily Times-Journal, July 30, 1912.

<sup>112</sup>Daily Times-Journal, August 2, 1912. On October 10 he was found guilty as charged and was released on a suspended sentence under a five hundred dollar bond. Daily News, October 10, 1912.

On July 30 the day following the riot

The police squad and soldiers ransacked the Italian houses in Port Arthur coal dock district . . . to see if they could recognize any who took part in the riot. <sup>113</sup>

The police were not successful in making additional arrests nor did they find any firearms. According to the Times-Journal it was likely that the Italians had anticipated the raid and hidden their weapons. <sup>114</sup> Also part of the difficulty was that many of the strikers were residents of Fort William. <sup>115</sup>

By July 31 the situation had calmed enough and the troops were withdrawn. However, the strike was also effective as no one ventured to work at the docks even though protection was offered. <sup>116</sup> Although the troops were withdrawn, the company's property was not left undefended. "A special squad of policemen armed with Winchester rifles with sufficient ammunition to blow the inhabitants of Port Arthur's 'Little Old Italy' into eternity" were soon patrolling the property of the Canadian Northern Coal and Ore Dock Company. <sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Daily Times-Journal, July 31, 1912.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., July 31, 1912.

<sup>115</sup> Daily News, July 31, 1912.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., August 1, 1912.

<sup>117</sup> Daily Times-Journal, August 1, 1912. The force

On Saturday night, August 3rd, five days after the strike had commenced, the company acceded to most of the demands of the coal handlers and the strike came to an end. The company agreed to reinstate the union officers, although it reserved the right to hire men regardless of whether or not they might belong to the union. On the matter of wages, the company agreed to a general 2¢ per hour increase, as well agreeing to pay the men time and a half for overtime and double time for Sundays and holidays.<sup>118</sup>

Two factors seem to account for the company's abrupt conciliatory attitude. First, the militancy attributed to the Italians had effectively discouraged local workers from being induced to act as strikebreakers even when offered police protection. The company had also failed to recruit strikebreakers in Winnipeg as a result of the general knowledge that violence had occurred.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, in 1912 locally unemployed labourers were scarce<sup>120</sup>

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consisted of twenty constables hired from various secret service agencies in Winnipeg and ten local men. Daily News, August 1, 1912.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., August 5, 1912.

<sup>119</sup>Daily Times-Journal, July 31, 1912. According to a newspaper article the company had offered "fancy wages" to labourers in Winnipeg "but when they heard that there had been shooting they backed down, notwithstanding the fact that fancy wages were offered with the guarantee of steady work the year round." Ibid., July 30, 1912.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., July 29, 1912.

and nationally the situation was much the same. For instance the C.P.R. was faced with a shortage of 2,000 labourers in its system.<sup>121</sup>

The coal handlers had accomplished at least a partial victory, but the strike had proven tragic for the Deprenzo brothers who had been arrested after their bodies had been riddled with police bullets. On October 8, 1912 they were brought to trial before Judge Middleton and a jury.<sup>122</sup> Dominick Deprenzo was charged with attempting to murder Chief of Police McLellan and Nicola was charged with assaulting Constable Peterson at the July 29th riot. Peterson gave the court evidence that when he saw Sergeant Burleigh, his colleague, at the verge of being attacked by Nicola with a club, he went to prevent the attack. In the scuffle after having fired five bullets into Nicola the injured man managed to land a club blow on his head that caused Peterson to pass out. Burleigh then stated that when Peterson was on the ground Nicola was intending to hit Peterson again when he fired another shot into Nicola's hand and subdued him. The Crown prosecutor also rested its case on the testimony of Burleigh who claimed that Dominick had struck Chief McLellan.

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., August 17, 1912.

<sup>122</sup>The following account of the trial is based on the News's account of the proceedings. Daily News, October 9, 1912.

The testimony given by Nicola differed considerably from the police version. According to Nicola, his brother Dominick was lying on the ground shot and was calling for help when a policeman actually raised him up to better administer to him another shot. In appealing to the jury the defence attorney reminded them to be cautious that the testimony of the crown prosecutor's witnesses might have an advantage since they presented it in fluent English and might sound more convincing, whereas the defendants had difficulty in speaking English and therefore were likely to be less convincing. He also pleaded to the jury that his two clients in addition to their language handicap, did not know the laws and customs of Canada and went on to dwell upon the humble virtues of the contadini and the important role they were playing in the industrial process:

He said they were mostly coarse, rough, uneducated peasants from southern Italy, their only advantage being their strong frames and tough sinews that made them an invaluable acquisition to Canada, for performing the rough, dirty work such as handling coal. They were, he said, the hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were thrifty and saving. Most of them had dependents away back in Italy and as each pay day came along they sent home their savings to support their loved ones at home.

The defence attorney suggested to the jury to keep in mind the overall circumstances of the Italian immigrants in their deliberation.

Then before the courtroom proceeding came to an end, Judge Middleton in addressing the Jury invalidated the

defence attorney's appeal in no uncertain terms. In his address he stressed that the law had to protect police officers who represented the welfare of the entire community, in executing their duties. As to the matter of Dominick's culpability, the Judge told the Jury that Dominick must have been guilty. Judge Middleton had come to this conclusion on the following evidence:

He [Judge Middleton] drew attention to the fact that there must have been very good reason for the suspicion that pointed at Durenzo [sic] as the man who struck down the chief, as he was evidently the target of the police after the riot began and had received, according to reports, not less than seven bullet wounds. It was strange, he said, that where there were more than 150 people, this man should be singled out as the one object of attack.

It was no consolation for the Deprenzo brothers, but it was common knowledge in the Italian community that in fact "Tony the Shoemaker" was the man who had struck the Chief over the head with a pick handle, and having fled the riot scene he burrowed his way deep into a hay barn and successfully avoided a police probe into the hay with steel rods. Eventually the "black Handers" (a few Italian Port Arthur merchants who were involved in prostitution, gambling and bootlegging) smuggled "Tony the Shoemaker" into the United States.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Anthony Pento. Constable Peterson had said in his testimony that "We went to arrest Tony Shumacke [sic], and I saw the chief walk up to him and put his hand on his shoulder." At this point Peterson and Constable Thurlow left McLellan and went after another striker. Daily News, October 9, 1912.

Judge Middleton saw the trial of the Deprenzo brothers as an opportunity to teach the "foreigners" and particularly the Italians a lesson and said so to the Jury:

The point that he emphasized was that those foreigners must not be led to believe that they can take the law in their own hands, throwing aside the measures provided by civilized society for the punishment of crime. If this condition was once allowed civilization would descend to barbarism and anybody having a grievance would be inclined to take the law in his own hands and resort to violence and outrage to avenge his wrongs. The law would be overthrown and the courts of Justice would be a hollow mockery. The point that must be brought home to these people was that violence in any form will not be tolerated in this country, regardless of any custom or usages prevailing in Russia, Finland, Italy or whatever country the foreign element comes from.

After weighing the various arguments the jury took one and a half hours to return with a verdict for Dominick. They found him guilty of unlawfully wounding and resisting arrest, but recommended that the charge of attempted murder be dropped. After twenty minutes of deliberation in the case of his brother Nicola, the jury returned also with a verdict of guilty on the charge of assaulting a constable.<sup>124</sup> On passing sentence, Judge Middleton sentenced both brothers to a prison term of ten years at Stoney Mountain Penitentiary.<sup>125</sup> The fate of the Deprenzo brothers caused grief

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1912.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., October 10, 1912. After serving their sentence the two unfortunate brothers returned home to Reggio Calabria in Southern Italy. Interview with Anthony Pento.

among those who had benefitted from the strike and they viewed the judge's stiff prison sentence as a case of "vindictive justice":

The result was that the company gave seventeen concessions, when before the strike only three had been asked. In this case between 250 and 300 men were affected. The labor men felt keenly the heavy sentence meted out to two of their number, and assert that it was a case of vindictive justice. They state that the strike brought the wrongs of the men forcibly before the public, and that all benefitted greatly except the two who got prison sentences.<sup>126</sup>

Even though in 1912 the contadini coal handlers had the advantage of striking within the framework of a union, nonetheless, violence marked this strike just as in the previous occasions when they struck without the benefit of being organized. It appears that the contadini's application of violence in the dispute came as a last resort and in order to safeguard the effectiveness of the picket line against would-be strike breakers. Their confrontation with the police force was to protect their leaders who in the process of enforcing the picket line were facing arrest and in this sense their violence in the 1912 strike had been both selective and limited.<sup>127</sup> In this case the contadini's

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<sup>126</sup> Social Survey of Port Arthur, 1913, p. 8.

<sup>127</sup> Even the Daily News, whose editorials during the previous strikes had been very critical of the conduct of the contadini, commented in its report of the "riot" of July 29 that: "One of the remarkable things about the attack of the mob upon the police is that when they had most of the

preparedness to risk their lives against armed policemen had been an essential factor to the partially successful outcome of the strike. It was because the news of the shooting spread to traditional hiring centres of labourers that the company was unable to recruit replacements, and had to eventually compromise on the workers' demands.<sup>128</sup>

It is apparent that the violence employed by the contadini in these strikes was prompted by their employers' conduct in the bargaining process.<sup>129</sup> Management's first step in response to a strike was almost instinctive in turning to local or imported recruits to break the strike. The only effective means that the contadini had to maintain alive the possibility of winning concessions was to introduce physical force to prevent others from taking their jobs.

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officers down and out they suddenly gave it up and retreated. A few more blows with the murderous clubs or a few more shots would have meant the annihilation of the small force." Daily News, July 30, 1912.

<sup>128</sup> Daily Times-Journal, July 31, 1912.

<sup>129</sup> In her study of "Ethnicity and Violence", Morrison concluded that a relationship did exist between Italian workers and violence. However, she is also of the opinion that the violence stemmed from the nature of industrial relations of the railways with immigrant labour. Morrison, "Ethnicity and Violence: The Lakehead Freight Handlers Before World War I", in Gregory S. Kealey, Peter Warrion ed., Essays in Canadian Working Class History (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), pp. 143-160. Also by the same author see, "Ethnicity and Class Consciousness: British, Finnish and South European Workers at the Canadian Lakehead before World War I", Lakehead University Review, IX No. 1 (Spring, 1976), pp. 41-54.

Without this resolve to risk their lives against the introduction of strikebreakers, the strike would in many cases have been a lost cause from the moment that it started.

During this turbulent decade of Canadian history, 1902-1912, the contadini of Fort William and Port Arthur, who came from Italy with no previous experience in industrial conflict faced with determination, practically all of the employers' schemes ever devised in the cause of strike-breaking. Paradoxically, they too for a short time became a tool of strikebreaking in 1907 after the British and other "foreign workers" had allowed the C.P.R.'s policy of excluding Italian labour without a challenge. It should be apparent, however, that the contadini made their greatest impact in the Twin Cities as effective strikers and not as strikebreakers.

The high degree of militancy that the contadini displayed in their new proletariat roles in the Twin Cities was not a trait that originated in the new industrial milieu. Rather, their militant actions were an application of the "revoltist traditions" which were deeply rooted in their agrarian background.<sup>130</sup> The militancy and violence of the

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<sup>130</sup>Horowitz points out that in many pre-industrial societies, protest against oppressive conditions is usually unorganized, giving rise to "revoltist traditions". In rural Italy, both in the South and the North central, "revoltist traditions" were particularly entrenched. Horowitz, op. cit., pp. 23, 327.

Italian immigrants was a response to general harsh industrial working conditions and was aimed at resolving immediate problems, mainly low wages, the notorious bonus system, long and irregular work hours and the threat of strikebreakers which the employers almost introduced automatically in strike situations. In the process the Italian workers were perceived by Anglo-Canadians of the Twin Cities as people of a "baser type" and of being a threat to the British ideals of law and order. Inevitably, this initial impact of the contadini upon the communities of the Twin Cities meant that Fort William's "Little Italy" was left with the task of coping with this stigma.

## CHAPTER V

### SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI BENEVOLENZA: PRINCIPE DI PIEMONTE-- A CASE STUDY

Throughout the various cities of North America where sizeable numbers of Italians settled, a mutual aid society (*società di mutuo soccorso*) usually emerged. This common institution that was formed by immigrants was not, however, a novel concept that was developed in the New World. Friendly societies or mutual aid organizations, according to labour economist Daniel L. Horowitz, began to appear in Italy during the early years of the nineteenth century. The societies at first tended to be organized according to area but gradually they organized on the basis of occupational categories. They usually had religious leanings such as being named after a patron saint and generally drew support from the wealthy. Their practical functions consisted of providing benefits usually for illness, old age and funeral expenses. Sometimes they also provided assistance to victims of accidents and to widows and orphans. The revolutions of 1848 caused a crucial change in the direction of their development. They gradually began to function as meeting places where new ideas

were discussed and consequently helped to increase ferment among various groups of wage-earners. Particularly in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Tuscany, the friendly societies fell under the control of Mazzini's supporters and took on the task of spreading the cause of Italian unification and the general liberal thinking of the Risorgimento. At the same time in the 1850s these societies coordinated their activities and continued their efforts to provide material and moral assistance to the working class through education and **direct** aid. In the 1880s a process began whereby many mutual aid organizations were transformed into trade unions while their numbers grew rapidly. It is estimated that there were more than 1500 societies by 1871, 5,000 by 1885 and 6,722 by 1894 and thereafter their number began to decline.<sup>1</sup>

In Boston, historian Anna Maria Martellone found that the initial societies that were formed in the late nineteenth century had as their primary aim the concept of mutual help. It soon became obvious, however, that as new immigrants arrived in the city from different areas of Italy they did not join existing societies but organized their own. In addition to the factor of campanalismo

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel L. Horowitz. The Italian Labor Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 12-18; 40.

(localism), societies multiplied for reasons of personal ambitions of certain individuals. Some societies were started by persons who wanted the satisfaction of being called "presidente" (president), while recruits easily followed in order to satisfy their desire to be able to wear an Italian military or para-military uniform that various societies acquired for purposes of parades and various other functions.<sup>2</sup>

Like their original counterparts in Italy, mutual aid societies in North America had also religious undertones. In Chicago, historian Humber S. Nelli found that many societies had close links with the local parish church and were often named after a patron saint of a particular town or village. Some societies even went so far as making church membership a necessary requirement for gaining society membership.<sup>3</sup> The Italian immigrants who settled in Fort William having come from various parts of Italy found that they were strangers among themselves and also that they were surrounded by a conglomeration of people who exhibited strange and diverse languages and customs. Here there were no unique Italian institutions whereby an immigrant

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<sup>2</sup>Martellone, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

<sup>3</sup>Humbert S. Nelli, Italians in Chicago 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 172.

could meet his fellow countrymen. Collective action was necessary in order that some degree of social coherence could be established within the group. Some men got together and after various discussions held in the houses of the individuals involved, an Italian benevolent society emerged. Appropriately enough the collective action produced a benevolent society: Società Italiana Di Benevolenza --Principe Di Piemonte,<sup>4</sup> established on April 24, 1909.<sup>5</sup> The name of the organization had been chosen to honour the child of the Italian Royal family who had been bestowed with the title of Principe Di Piemonte.<sup>6</sup> The decision to establish a mutual aid society was in conformity with the existing pattern in the various communities in North America where Italians had settled.<sup>7</sup> The Società Italiana Di Benevolenza--Principe Di Piemonte adapted its functions to meet some of the unique needs of the Italian immigrants in Fort William, yet, its essential features as an institution, did not differ from the typical mutual aid societies in Italy described by Francesco Saverio Nitti in 1909:

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<sup>4</sup>For a list of the names of the founders of this Society see Appendix C. For a list of past presidents of this Society see Appendix D.

<sup>5</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Michele Salatino, May 31, 1974.

<sup>7</sup>According to A. V. Spada, the first Italian society in Canada was the Società Nazionale established in 1875 in Montreal. Spada, op. cit., p. 96.

mutual aid societies are composed of contadini and artisans, and the former are admitted since the societies welcome any type of manual worker. The aims of these societies are: bestowal of money benefits, or medical aid and medicine in time of illness, or an indemnity to the family in case of death. Mutual aid societies also make small loans of money to their members. . . . Women are admitted as members in a few of these societies, but this practice is not common.<sup>8</sup>

From its very inception the Principe Di Piemonte restricted membership to Italian men between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five. Immigrants who joined the society were required to pay an admission fee ranging from two dollars to five dollars, the sum being progressively higher as the age category advanced.<sup>9</sup> The rationale behind this stipulation was that the older a person was at the time of his entrance to the organization the less money he would contribute to the society in the long run. At the same time the older person would be more likely to fall ill and collect benefits. In addition to the entrance fee, members contributed a monthly sum of fifty cents. The Principe Di Piemonte did not have its own building until 1923 when

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<sup>8</sup>Nitti, op. cit., IV, p. 328 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup>The following is a schedule of the entrance fees according to age category:

18 to 30 = \$2.00; 30 to 35 = \$2.50; 35 to 40 = \$3.00; 40 to 45 = \$4.00; 45 to 50 = \$5.00; for individuals over 50 years of age their admission fee would be decided by the executive members. Statuto E Regolamento, Articles 17-19, pp. 9-10.

it was decided to purchase the building of a former Finnish church known as "Apostle Lutheran Church" (located at 600 McLaughlin Street) for the amount of \$600.<sup>10</sup> Up to this time the society had rented a building at the corner of Christie Street and McLaughlin in the East End. The wooden church structure was transported to a plot of land on nearby 501 Christie Street where it stood until 1930. The structure was then moved up to the front of the lot facing McLaughlin Street where it has remained until July, 1975. In the late thirties further additions and renovations were made to the building. In 1937 the society in an effort to raise funds also acquired a licence to sell beer and a bar was established at the back of the building.<sup>11</sup>

The role of the Principe Di Piemonte within the Italian community went far beyond a strictly mutual aid function. It provided an opportunity for men who did not know one another to socialize, a function which was basic to the society. The Principe Di Piemonte may be viewed

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<sup>10</sup>In order to raise this amount members were asked to make small loans to the Society of \$10.00. Taped interview with Michele Salatino, May 31, 1974; Deeds of Land, 1899 and 1923. Plan 54, Block 45, Lot 10, Fort William, Ontario.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Michele Salatino, May 31, 1974; On October 25, 1975 the Society officially opened its new edifice known as the "Da Vinci Centre" on Waterloo Street.

as a "family figure" that not only concerned itself about its members but also was concerned to advance the welfare of the entire Italian "colony". Because of this paternalistic concern the role of the society acquires a greater importance and a detailed study of its actions can provide a valuable historical insight into the group dynamics of an Italian "colony".

Uprooted from their social setting, Italian immigrants found themselves in a social vacuum. The majority of men did not have their families with them in Fort William and this was a serious matter since the family was one of the most fundamental social institutions in the Italian culture. "For an Italian his family is his solace, his source of comfort, his bulwark against social injustice and the rigorous life."<sup>12</sup> For these Italians society in general was viewed as merely an extension of the family, as the opening sentence of the constitution of the Principe Di Piemonte clearly affirmed: "Society is a family."<sup>13</sup> This conception of society implied that it was not good enough for individuals to live independent of each other. Society, then, was expected to be a highly personalized

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<sup>12</sup>Gianni, Bartocci, "The Italian People" in Gianni Bartocci (ed.), On Italy And The Italians (Available from the Office of Continuing Education, University of Guelph), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, p. 5.

set of relationships. The Italian immigrants in Fort William sensed the lack of the traditional social milieu that had guided and regulated their conduct in Italy. Since they did not see themselves as integrated members of Canadian society they opted to encourage the development of their own subculture. The founders of the Principe Di Piemonte in this effort sought cohesion within the group and discredited in no uncertain terms the notion of individualism by virtue of exalting the constructive function of society:

Society civilizes man, renders man stronger, powerful, guides him on the path of good, spurs him toward fraternal love and reciprocal help, and to honour and to keep always high the name of the Patria [mother-country].<sup>14</sup>

The concern to do honour to the Patria is an indication of the high degree of group consciousness that existed. Individual Italians realized their reputations were highly tied to the reputation of the Italian group in general. Doing honour to the Patria provided a common basis to keep group unity strong. The immigrants felt it was essential that Italians be strongly united.<sup>15</sup> Thus, when the founders of the Principe Di Piemonte embarked upon drawing up a constitution, the document that was produced apart from providing normal rules and regulations also made

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 5 (my translation).

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Michele Salatino, May 31, 1974.

provisions to promote certain traditional norms that in Italy had been fulfilled by the family and the community.

One of the most outstanding social features of the Statuto E Regolamento (constitution) of the benevolent society was its attention to the ritual of death. Oscar Handlin in his study of the nineteenth and early twentieth century immigration to the United States found that while the life of the immigrants was full of problems, the first concern of their mutual aid societies was death. Back home the transition from the world of the flesh to the world of the soul had been given considerable importance. The dead person would be buried in a cemetery among friends and relatives. This process involved specific rites that had to be followed. Relatives and fellow villagers naturally assisted with this last communal duty. In North America, the immigrant faced the prospect of being buried by strangers in a land far away from relatives and hence his body would have to lie in perpetual loneliness. These are some of the reasons that lead Handlin to conclude:

More than anything in life itself, the immigrants wished security in death; and the first task of the mutual aid society was to provide that assurance.<sup>16</sup>

The founders of the Principe Di Piemonte gave

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<sup>16</sup>Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted--The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made The American People (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), pp. 173-174.

immediate attention to the ritual of death. There is no question that the concern exhibited by Handlin's "uprooted" toward death was equally present in the minds of the Italian immigrants of Fort William. The constitution of the Principe Di Piemonte stipulated that a member in good standing in case of death would be assured of a proper funeral. La Società would pay \$75.00 toward the expenses of the funeral. Members were eligible for this protection anywhere in Canada. The revenue to meet these expenses was raised by taxing each member one dollar when a funeral would take place.<sup>17</sup> A proper burial did not merely mean having the necessary money to pay the expenses involved. The most important element of the funeral was the participation of the membership in the "accompagnamenti funebri" (funeral processions). Article 72 of their constitution stipulated that absence from taking part in the funeral ritual carried a heavy fine of \$3.00.<sup>18</sup> A three dollar penalty was a sum that not too many immigrants would care to pay when one considers that the average daily wage for an immigrant working as a freight handler was 17½ cents per hour in 1909.<sup>19</sup> This provision

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<sup>17</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, Articles 72, 80, 87, 91.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Art. 90.

<sup>19</sup>The Labour Gazette, X, September, 1909, p. 342.

then underlined the high degree of importance that the immigrants gave to the last communal duty, the accompagnamento.

In 1920 it was agreed that the privilege of accompagnamento would be extended to the wives of the members.<sup>20</sup> This decision is a good indication that the Principe Di Piemonte was not merely intended to be an exclusive club for the sociability of men. Its more fundamental function was to superimpose upon its members a set of social obligations that back in Europe had been essential elements of the social code of the family and of the community.

During the economic depression of the 1930's the task of providing psychological assurance at the time of death had become a heavy financial burden for the membership. While the \$3.00 penalty that was to be imposed to any member who was absent from a funeral may have been a realistic deterrent in 1909 it was clearly too harsh a measure during the depression. In 1934 there was concern among the leadership of the Society that the \$3.00 fine was now too severe and unless it was modified many members would simply abandon the organization.<sup>21</sup> This reappraisal of the stiff regulations that governed one of the fundamental symbols

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<sup>20</sup>Minutes of the Società Italiana Di Benevolenza-- Principe Di Piemonte, February 8, 1920 (hereafter referred to; Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte).

<sup>21</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, October 27, 1934.

of group cohesiveness did not imply that it had become less important to the "colony". Rather a modification of the regulations was intended to strengthen the ritual.

In the middle of the depression it was realized that the costs for funeral expenses had increased since 1909 when the death benefit was set at \$75.00.<sup>22</sup> It was felt by some members that this amount was no longer adequate and despite the poor economic conditions of the Society during the 1930s, the assembly decided to increase the death benefit to \$100.00.<sup>23</sup> This decision to increase the death benefit, however, was not unanimous. The opposing faction felt that if each member was still required to contribute \$1.00 when a fellow-member died, the excess sum beyond the \$75.00 death benefit should be applied toward the improvement of the general financial position of the Society.<sup>24</sup>

Economic conditions were reflected in the inability of some members to comply with their financial obligation of \$1.00. The concern over the many members who were now behind in this financial requirement reached a climax when on December 2, 1934 a motion was passed in the assembly

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1934.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., November 18, 1934. In 1955 the death benefit was raised to \$150.00, Ibid., March 9, 1955.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., November 16, 1934.

stipulating that members had one hundred days to pay their overdue amounts to the death fund. Members who did not comply with this deadline would not be entitled to any benefits from the Society in the event of their own death.<sup>25</sup>

While the crisis over the costs of funerals was in progress, the request of a dying member must have served as a reminder that a solution had to be found. On January 28, 1935 a special meeting of the Assembly was held to consider the death of a member, Michele Mazzuca. The President of the Society, Frank Cerra, informed the members that the deceased during the course of his long illness had confided to him that at his death he wanted nothing from the Principe Di Piemonte. His only desire was that he be accompanied by the Society at his funeral. Mr. Mazzuca was granted his desire for "security in death". The members agreed to commission a street car to transport them the next day to Port Arthur where the funeral was to take place.<sup>26</sup>

President Cerra was determined to find the means to safeguard the funeral tradition that Article 72 had helped to shape. Two months after Mazzuca's funeral, he was still looking for ways to improve funeral procedures. He proposed that aside from the regular obligation that the

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., December 2, 1934.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1935.

members had to accompany a deceased member from his home to the Chiesa Italiana (Italian church), the volunteers that accompanied the deceased to the cemetery would form an Honorary Guard carrying Italian and Canadian flags, and the leader of this Guard would make a speech for the occasion.<sup>27</sup> In the month of August of 1935 further discussion on the funeral question was held in two consecutive gatherings. The executive reached an agreement that once the family of the deceased had received the death benefit of one hundred dollars the remaining balance of the one dollar contribution that each member had to make would go into a special account and that funds ~~from~~ this account would be used only to pay benefits for other members that would die.<sup>28</sup> This executive decision was short lived and at their next meeting the matter came up once more for discussion. It was realized that the membership was very slow in fulfilling the one dollar contributions for deceased members and the executive once more issued another polite reminder that members could not expect to remain in the Society unless they were prepared to fulfill their social obligation.<sup>29</sup>

On September 22, 1935 a special meeting was called

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., April 18, 1935.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., August 2, 1935.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1935.

for the purpose of finding a permanent solution to the problem. President Cerra proposed that Article 72 be abolished, and commencing the month of October members would no longer be required to pay the one dollar contribution. He proposed instead to raise the one hundred dollars death benefit by putting aside into a death fund ten cents out of the fifty cents monthly dues of each member. In the event that this fund was not sufficient to meet the death benefits, then the Society would make a loan to the fund from its general treasury. Members, however, were required to bring up to date their one dollar payments for each of the four recent deceased members.<sup>30</sup> It is understandable why the Society was incurring difficulties in getting the contributions. In a period of economic hardship it was no doubt a burden to be confronted with a financial obligation each time a member died. It is no wonder that Cerra's proposal was received by the assembly with much applause.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the abolition of Article 72 while the Society was experiencing difficulty in receiving the death benefit payment, it proved good strategy not to attempt to enforce the three dollar fine upon members who were not

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., September 22, 1935.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

regularly attending funerals. The danger of enforcing this heavy fine almost certainly would have caused many members to withdraw from the organization and in addition the Society would have lost their monthly fifty cents contribution. This fear had been clearly expressed by Frank Cerra.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, on October 2, 1936 it was noted that lately only a small percentage of the members were in fact attending the funerals. Being anxious to remedy this development that was threatening one of the most important social conventions of the Society, the executive agreed to form three separate groups of members in good standing with two executive members in each group. The three groups then would take turns in attending funerals.<sup>33</sup> Although this plan no doubt would have eased the social obligation of having to attend numerous funerals, it was not implemented. It was not long before the financial formula agreed upon on September 22nd whereby the \$100 death benefits would be raised by placing in a special fund twenty percent of the monthly 50¢ membership fees proved to be pitifully inadequate. Consequently, the assembly voted in favour of abolishing the death fund altogether and it was agreed to

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., October 27, 1934.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1936.

rely on the general funds of the Society for death benefits.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Article 72, one of the pillars in the effort to establish a strong subsociety, became a victim of the economic depression. The abolition of the financial threat was not altogether a setback for the social cohesion of the "colony". The Society had by 1935 been in formal existence for twenty-six years and it was now a good occasion to test their achievements in a more informal atmosphere. For its part the executive continued to encourage members through persuasion to attend this important social ritual. This concern did not fade away and members were now even being urged that in case some of them could not be present for some legitimate reason at a funeral of a member that they ought to commission a relative to represent them.<sup>35</sup>

For the Italian "colony" the funeral ritual helped tremendously to bring together in intimate interaction Italians that were strangers to each other. The funeral ritual at the same time provided the "security in death" that many Italian immigrants sought. The Fort William experience demonstrates that only collective action and a considerable effort were adequate to guarantee an immigrant this security.

In addition to providing security in death, the

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1936.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1938.

Principe Di Piemonte also attempted to put into practice the principle of material reciprocal help. Article 77 of its constitution outlined the programme that was established to assist financially members that were temporarily incapacitated because of illness. The sick benefit programme was not meant to be a comprehensive insurance scheme but it was to serve as an expression of brotherhood and solidarity.<sup>36</sup> In 1915 the membership agreed to a plan that would provide financial assistance to ill members for a maximum period of six months. The individual would be entitled to receive \$5.00 per week for the first two months of illness, \$2.50 per week for the next 2 months period and \$1.25 per week for the last two months. In case a member's illness exceeded a period of six months the executive would review the case and decide whether additional help would be given.<sup>37</sup>

The sick benefit programme was proclaimed to be serving only a symbolic function, yet for the average immigrant who was far removed from friends and relatives,

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<sup>36</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, Art. 77, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, February, 1915. In the 1924 revised Constitution of the Society the basic terms of this plan remain the same. The only changes made were that during the last two months of the six month maximum period that a member was insured he was to receive \$1.65 per week rather than \$1.25 per week as had been the case earlier. Secondly, individual cases of illness that went beyond the six month period would be reviewed by the Assembly rather than the Executive. Statuto E Regolamento, Art. 77, p. 19.

the scheme was also of practical value when illness struck. The price that he had to pay for this modest protection was not high. His 50¢ monthly membership fees was all that it cost him. The concrete value of the plan, however, was the only important feature that some members understood. A case in point that demonstrates this feeling occurred when in 1915 a member submitted a sick-claim for a period of three weeks that he had been ill. The Society issued him a cheque for the amount of \$15.00 in accordance with the terms of the scheme and he complained that this amount was too little. In a fit of anger he destroyed the cheque in the presence of the others and announced his immediate resignation.<sup>38</sup> This dramatic protest did not influence the Society to change the terms of the plan.

Members that fell ill submitted their claims regularly and were grateful for the financial assistance they received. Under the plan considerable amounts were paid to members and this money provided them with a certain degree of economic and psychological security. An examination of the sick claims submitted during the first four months of 1918 provides a good indication of the type of aid that the scheme provided. At the beginning of the year a member received \$65.00 for having been ill a total

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<sup>38</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, February, 1915.

of three months and another member claimed \$20.00 for four weeks of illness.<sup>39</sup> In March another member received \$47.50 for a period of two and one-half months of illness,<sup>40</sup> while the very next month the Society paid two members \$42.50 and \$10.00 respectively for their particular periods of illness. In addition the family of a deceased member was given \$92.00 which represented a combination of funeral aid and sick benefit.<sup>41</sup> This pattern of benefit payments generally continued uninterrupted until 1932 when financial resources of the Society were diverted toward the expansion of the edifice.

In 1932 the Principe Di Piemonte decided to move the wooden building from the location facing Christie Street to face McLaughlin Street. Some additions to the building were also made. In order to cope with the expenses involved in these improvements the Society decided to discontinue for a period of one year the sick benefit programme.<sup>42</sup> The decision to improve the edifice in the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., January 6, 1918.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1918.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., April 14, 1918.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1932.

initial years of the depression, however, proved ill timed. The diversion of funds to this project curtailed the Principe Di Piemonte from being able to continue with the sick benefit plan during an era that this social service was most required. In 1934 the Society found that it was necessary to extend discontinuation of sick benefits for another year.<sup>43</sup> The matter was once more reviewed in 1936 when it was decided that the moratorium on sick benefits was to remain until such a time as the Society could once more afford its costs.<sup>44</sup>

The temporary abandonment of the sick benefit programme did not mean total neglect of the ill. A two-man committee known as "Sanitary Officers" was still expected to visit members afflicted by illness.<sup>45</sup> This committee was also granted \$1.00 to be used for purchasing a small gift that they would bring to the sick person.<sup>46</sup> The committee of Sanitary Officers had played a dual role. Its primary function prior to the implementation of a moratorium on the sick benefit plan had been to inspect the

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., September 2, 1934.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1936.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1931.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., April 3, 1932.

sick members as to whether they were truly ill and report their findings to the Society. In case the Sanitary Officers were in doubt regarding the nature and extent of a person's illness they could call a doctor to examine the patient.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, the Sanitary Committee played a social function of bringing comfort and sympathy to the sick. Quite aside from the financial assistance that the sick benefit scheme had offered, its social role cannot be underestimated. In a setting where many men were isolated from their families and traditional circle of friends, in times of illness, a visit from the Sanitary Committee was surely much appreciated. The overwhelming ratio of men to women who emigrated from Europe at the turn of the century, made male immigrants realize that only through organized co-operation could they overcome their social isolation. Without the assistance of the family, falling ill was a serious matter.

Like the Principe Di Piemonte, other mutual aid organizations saw fit to concentrate their efforts in matters of illness and death. For instance in Port Arthur a Swedish Sick Benefit and Funeral Aid Society had preceded the establishment of the Principe Di Piemonte and had also designed its Sick Benefit Committee to serve the needs of the isolated person:

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1927.

The duties of the Sick Benefit Committee shall be to visit a member reported ill at least within twelve hours after receipt of such report (if circumstances permit). The Committee shall render such assistance to the sick member as circumstances may warrant, call for a doctor's certificate and see to it that the same is truthfully made out, and report the case at the meeting of the Society. If proper care of a sick member is wanting the Committee shall then notify the chairman of the Society, who may then request other members, two at a time and in turn, to stay with the sick member during each night as required. A member who has been requested by the chairman to act in such case shall not without sufficient reason refuse to do so.<sup>48</sup>

The clearly defined procedure of the Swedish Society to deal with a sick member who may have been living alone in a rooming house goes a long way to explain how the ethnic mutual benefit societies became very important to the immigrants.

The moratorium on the sick benefit plan did not prevent the members from raising a few dollars by passing a hat around and taking up a collection for an individual that was ill and in need of aid.<sup>49</sup> Concern for the sick persisted and a token payment of 30¢ per week was assigned to any member who was hospitalized.<sup>50</sup> In an effort to

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<sup>48</sup>Constitution of The Sick Benefit and Funeral Aid Society.--Norskenet (Northern Light) in Port Arthur, Ontario, Organized 17th of April, 1905. Art. 32, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, December 4, 1933.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., March 12, 1934.

further ease the burden on members who fell ill, they were exempted from having to pay their monthly membership fees and would continue to be considered members in good standing.<sup>51</sup>

These various efforts to find an alternative to the sick benefit plan indicates the high value that Italian immigrants placed on maintaining a system of moral and material support within the group. The sick benefit plan was not, however, an isolated project of the Society; rather it was an essential component of the total thrust of the aims and objectives of the organization. The proclaimed "noble" aims of the Society were to do honour to the Patria so that in turn Italians would be better accepted by Canadian society. One way of doing honour to the Patria was for individuals to practice good behaviour. The sick benefit plan was also designed to encourage this behaviour by virtue of denying assistance to members whose illness was caused by what was considered socially unacceptable behaviour. The Constitution stipulated that sick benefits would not be extended to members who were afflicted with venereal diseases, and other diseases stemming from abuse of alcoholic beverages and from deplorable conduct.<sup>52</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1934.

<sup>52</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, Art. 77, p. 19.

the Principe Di Piemonte seized on every opportunity to promote respectable behaviour and in doing so it became in a subtle manner an agent of social control within the Italian "colony".

The Principe Di Piemonte played a particularly important role for the Italian "colony" during the era of the Great Depression. The economic crisis caused acute hardships to most Canadians especially the prairie farmers, the unemployed, the old, the sick and the handicapped. Many of these "wretched" Canadians "scratched" a letter in pencil to their millionaire Prime Minister, R. B. Bennett, begging for a job or for financial assistance. The lucky ones received a reply with a \$5.00 gift while other equally desperate individuals were ignored.<sup>53</sup> Serious illness greatly compounded the hardships of people. Here is a vivid example of a "wretched" Canadian who having no one else to turn to for help appeals to R. B. Bennett for aid and is fortunate enough to receive a reply and a \$5.00 gift.

Chadwick  
Ont June 15, 1935

Dear Sir:--

No doubt you will be surprised to receive this letter I have been advised by a friend of your's to

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<sup>53</sup>L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss (ed.), The Wretched of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. vi-xxv.

write you in so doing I am asking you to Please not let this be Known in Public as my husband doesn't like me to ask for help from any one we have had so much sickness in our family the last 9 yrs. and specially the last seven months I havn't been able to do anything for nearly seven months having a real serious operation my heart has gone bad my two girls 10. and 12 yrs old have both be sick since Feb. under medical treatment I have not the money to give them or myself the medicine we should and we are all in much need of clothes if you have any suits or clothing for men you have given up I wish you would send some to us or if you feel you could send me a little money to help for some clothes for the girls I am sure I would feel very thankful for it if you know how hard we have tried and how much sickness and trouble we have had I am sure you would help us some if you send anything in Parcel or money send it direct to me I am sure I will make the best of it Possible our address is Mrs. Stewart Nolan Chadwick Ont either Post office or express. May God bless you in your Service I might say we are on a farm doing our best.<sup>54</sup>

Grayson and Bliss have noted that the number of \$5.00 responses from the Office of the Prime Minister increased when election day neared. This would suggest that R. B. Bennett and his assistants made these humanitarian gestures as calculated political manoeuvres designed to win votes.<sup>55</sup>

Many Italian immigrants of Fort William found themselves in the 1930's among the "wretched" of the nation. The average immigrant even if he or she wanted to did not possess the skill to formulate a letter in the English

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

language to appeal to the nation's Prime Minister for help. Many Italians who needed immediate help turned to an institution that was much closer to them and that was the Principe Di Piemonte. During the 1930's the Society found itself overburdened with requests for aid from both its own members and connazionali (fellow countrymen). The recurring theme of these requests was lack of financial resources to meet health related expenses. From this observation it is reasonable to conclude that health care was the most serious problem and the most expensive need that confronted the Italian immigrants in Fort William. Public medical insurance, of course, did not exist at the time.

The collective conscience of the Principe Di Piemonte was quick to go to the aid of individuals in distress. In 1931 the Society learned that one of its members, Vincenzo Lileo, a man in financial straits, was advised by his doctor to return to Italy in order to better regain his health. A special meeting was called by the Society with the aim of doing something to help this unfortunate man. There was plenty of sympathy for Lileo who had to return to the Patria just as poor as when he had left it. The President, Frank Scavarelli, proposed that \$50.00 be given to Lileo but a counter motion was introduced to make the sum \$75.00. The two motions were voted upon by secret ballot and both motions received equal votes. Finally, a compromise was reached to

give \$65.00 to the departing member.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of 1931 the high rate of unemployed immigrants had become very apparent. For this reason it was thought proper to pay back to some members the money that they had lent to the Society when in 1923 the edifice was purchased.<sup>57</sup> Symptoms of the economic crisis soon began to emerge. A connazionale in a letter to the Society appealed for some financial assistance explaining that his son had been ill for a long time and now he had found a doctor that promised to cure him. Only lack of money stood between his son's illness and a cure. The Society did not ignore the father's hopes and responded with a \$25.00 donation.<sup>58</sup>

Often seriously ill Italian immigrants found it necessary to travel to distant cities where more sophisticated medical facilities were available. Some went to Toronto, the provincial capital, while the majority went to the famous medical clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Going to these centres for medical attention involved considerable expense and many Italians, finding themselves in serious financial straits, turned to the Principe Di Piemonte for

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., March 12, 1931.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., December 23, 1931.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1932.

assistance.

In August, 1932 when a connazionale asked the Society to help finance his trip to a clinic in Toronto, he was granted \$20.00. In addition a three-man committee was immediately formed to raise funds for this needy person.<sup>59</sup> Later in the year the Society realized that a more systematic approach would have to be developed to better confront extreme cases of hardship that were surely to emerge in the immediate future. The Society decided to form a sub-committee, "Comitato di Sussistenza Italiano" (Italian Aid Committee) whose only task was to go to the aid of needy Italians.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately this committee's only performance was in helping to decorate a Christmas tree in honour of all the Italian children of the "colony".<sup>61</sup> The Society reverted to the practice of giving individual consideration to calls for assistance.

While the Principe Di Piemonte did not turn down any requests for aid from Italians who found themselves in financial difficulties due to illness, it appears that in such cases members had a slight advantage over the connazionale.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., August 7, 1932.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1932.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1933; The available documents do not shed any light as to the ineffectiveness of this sub-committee.

For instance when in 1935 a connazionale asked the Society to help him finance a trip to the Rochester Clinic he was given \$10.00.<sup>62</sup> A year later a member who placed a similar request before the Society was given \$25.00.<sup>63</sup> While being a member gave a person an expected edge in time of need, the Society did not emphasize this difference.

Throughout the Great Depression the financial position of the Society was fairly weak and this led to the decision in 1932 to phase out temporarily its official sick benefit plan. Appeals for aid by members and connazionali were causing serious financial strains on the Society and in the latter part of 1937 the issue of aid came up for heated debate. In July of that year the Society was asked by one of its members for a loan so that he could send his sick wife to Rochester for medical attention. The Principe Di Piemonte in response made a \$75.00 loan available to this individual.<sup>64</sup> In October the Society granted outright to another of its members \$25.00 to help with his costs for surgery at Rochester.<sup>65</sup> Later in December the Society found itself considering another request for aid from a

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., June, 1935.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1936.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., July 30, 1937.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., October 3, 1937.

member in Rochester who was undergoing medical treatment and found himself in strained financial conditions. This member was also granted \$25.00 but during the course of the debate over the request a motion was moved stipulating that in future the Society would no longer consider requests for aid. The mover of the motion obviously resented seeing constantly the financial resources of the organization being depleted by special requests from individuals in difficulties. None of the members dared to second this motion.<sup>66</sup> There is no doubt that from a financial viewpoint it would have been expedient to adopt the motion as proposed but doing so would have destroyed the philosophical rationalization of the benevolent society. The Society had already placed a moratorium on its sick benefit plan, but to refuse a person collective assistance in time of critical circumstances could not easily be justified. Also the members had a vested interest in maintaining the tradition of assistance since no one could foretell when a serious illness could afflict him or his family. They felt that if the need arose in the future the Society should be there to help them as others had been aided in the past.

The immediate community in Fort William's East End was aware that the Principe Di Piemonte had a moral obli-

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., December 5, 1937.

gation to help in improving the social conditions of the Italian "colony". In 1934 the principal of St. Peter's School, the area's school, asked the President, Frank Cerra, whether the Society would make available some funds that were needed to procure books for children of Italian immigrants who were on relief and could not afford to buy their own school supplies. The response was a \$5.00 gift.<sup>67</sup> On a similar request two years later the executives decided that this time assistance would be limited to children of needy members provided that these children approached the President who was given the responsibility to judge whether the applicants were truly in need of assistance.<sup>68</sup> This qualified approval for aid reflected the organization's generally poor financial position.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the Principe Di Piemonte sheltered the Italian "colony" of Fort William entirely from the more acute problems brought upon Canadians by the Great Depression. At the same time the concrete and psychological assistance that this institution provided cannot be overlooked. It was surely of comfort for an Italian immigrant to know that if he or his family

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1934.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1936.

were faced with a serious illness that he could take their case before this collective body and get a few dollars. The modest amounts of money that individuals were granted may never have solved completely their financial needs; however, these amounts were much more substantial than what other "wretched" Canadians in similar health and financial conditions were able to get by pleading their cases to such as the Prime Minister himself.

The modest amounts which the Society granted to both its members and connazionali suggests that the members of a cooperative organization and of a highly conscious minority group developed considerable empathy for their fellows in time of need. In Fort William, the Principe Di Piemonte helped to cushion both the real and psychological stress within the Italian "colony" during the Great Depression. The financial aid helped to create a feeling of social interdependence among Italians -- a feeling vividly and nostalgically recalled by Italians who were participant in this era of Canadian history: "In those early days there was much more friendship among Italians -- not like today!"<sup>69</sup> Being a member of the Principe Di Piemonte or simply a connazionale in the 1930's was certainly an advantage. It is in this context that

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<sup>69</sup>Interview with Michele Salatino, May 31, translation).

ethnic unity within the Italian community can best be understood.

Aside from its various mutual aid functions the Principe Di Piemonte became both the promoter and the centre of the social life for the Italian "colony". Since the Society had in part been organized because of the existing social vacuum, it had recognized the need for organized social activities. One of the clearest expressions of this sentiment was the inclusion in the Society's constitution of a clause making the holding of an annual picnic a constitutional requirement. The executive committee was made responsible for organizing this annual event and the members were equally required to purchase an attendance ticket.<sup>70</sup> This form of recreational activity captured the imagination of the founders of the Society for a variety of reasons. Italian immigrants had been accustomed back home to celebrate traditional feast days in the outdoors in the company of entire communities. In Fort William the picnic became a valuable continuation of the European tradition. Such an annual picnic offered an excellent opportunity to bring together not only the members of the Society and their families but also the Italian immigrants who were not members. For these reasons the picnic became the only social event

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<sup>70</sup> Statuto E Regolamento, Articles 74, 75, pp. 18-19.

that was officially institutionalized by being incorporated into the constitution of the Society.

In 1932 the scope of this annual event was widened when for the first time the Principe Di Piemonte invited the newly formed Italian Mutual Benevolent Society of neighbouring Port Arthur to participate in a joint picnic.<sup>71</sup> Large numbers from both Italian communities were brought together for the first time; however, not all were pleased with this new development. When in 1933 the Italian Benevolent Society of Port Arthur reciprocated with an invitation to hold a second joint picnic considerable opposition developed within ranks of the Principe Di Piemonte. The invitation won acceptance by a vote of sixty-three in favour and thirty-five against.<sup>72</sup> This opposition toward holding joint picnics persisted and in 1935 the matter had to be put to a vote once again. This time there were thirty-seven members in favour of holding a joint picnic and fourteen against.<sup>73</sup> The Intercity area was the usual site of these joint picnics since his location was a half-way point between the two communities. These few joint picnics represent the only

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<sup>71</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, August, 1932.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., May 7, 1933.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., June 2, 1935. Unfortunately the Minutes do not provide any information as to why there was opposition to joint picnics.

occasions when the members of the two Italian communities came together. Without the two respective Societies it is very unlikely that these social encounters would have taken place at all.

The picnic provided a day of fun and socialization, the highlight of which was a draw for prizes. In 1933, for instance, the prizes consisted of a bicycle worth \$25.00 and a radio worth \$35.00. Tickets for the draw sold at 25¢ each.<sup>74</sup> Particularly in the 1930's the many persons who were unemployed and could not readily afford to purchase these items found their hopes raised when they held a ticket for the draw. In 1935 the three prizes that were acquired for the occasion were a \$25.00 man's suit, a \$15.00 watch and a \$10.00 lamp.<sup>75</sup> Although the picnic was a family affair the event was organized by a totally male institution. The choice of the first prizes, in this case a man's suit, generally reflected the male dominated social life of the "colony". By 1935 the picnic had grown in popularity and had become an essential social event of each summer.

In the early days of the "colony" there was considerable interest among Italian immigrants about establishing in the new community as much of their cultural tradition

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., May 1933.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1935.

as possible. Back home many of them had known musical town bands. In Italy these bands had been the central attractions at the processions of saints. The band either followed or preceded in the procession the statues of saints that were paraded throughout the town or village. Band music had also been popular to celebrate secular festivals. In time of death it was customary for people who were able to afford it to hire a band to play funeral music during the funeral procession.<sup>76</sup> When in January, 1919 a member of the Society, G. Fogolin, suggested the formation of a band he won immediate support from the membership who endorsed the idea and commissioned a special committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing such a band.<sup>77</sup> Within a month the members agreed that each one should contribute \$5.00 towards the realization of this project.<sup>78</sup> Soon a member of the Society, R. Colosimo, was appointed the Maestro of the band.<sup>79</sup> The enterprise involved considerable effort and

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<sup>76</sup>Interviews.

<sup>77</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, January 5, 1919.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., February 2, 1919.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., May 4, 1919. Ralph Colosimo immigrated to Fort William in 1907. From 1913 to 1921 he was a member of the Port Arthur City Band and bandmaster during the last two years of this period. Later on his musical activities included conducting a sixty-five-piece Thunder Bay Orchestra and the Lake Superior Regiment Band. Prior to his death in

fund-raising. A \$500.00 insurance policy was acquired for protection of the band equipment<sup>80</sup> and \$158.00 was spent on the purchase of fifty-two hats for each band member.<sup>81</sup>

The sizeable amount of the investment for establishing the band is an indication of the enthusiasm with which the members of the Italian community viewed the preservation of a popular aspect of their culture in Fort William. Although the members of the Society were expected to contribute \$5.00 each some members, particularly Italian store keepers, contributed \$10.00. The highest contribution came from the Italian Agente Consolare, Emilio Marino. In all over one hundred persons contributed to the project resulting in a total sum of \$735.00. In only eight months from January to August of 1919 the formation of a band had become a reality.<sup>82</sup>

R. Colosimo, the Maestro, conducted two music classes

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1952 he established the Colosimo Accordion School which was composed of three studios in the Twin Cities. "Noted Lakehead Musician, A. Ralph Colosimo Dies at 59", News-Chronicle, October 21, 1952; For additional biographical data on this Italo-Canadian musician see Spada, op. cit., pp. 328-329. Today the offspring of this outstanding local musician still operate this musical enterprise known as Colosimo Music Store & Studio Inc., and is located at 176 Algoma Street, Thunder Bay.

<sup>80</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, March 14, 1920.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1920.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., March-August 1919.

per week in order to train the musicians.<sup>83</sup> The band was obliged to perform on behalf of the Principe Di Piemonte on two types of events as had been the case in Italy, namely on feast days and in funeral processions of deceased members of the Society.<sup>84</sup>

The band itself had a rather short life despite the initial remarkable enthusiasm. By 1924 the band was not in a good financial state and a decision was reached to sell the musical instruments.<sup>85</sup> Eventually they were sold three years later for \$250.00 and the musicians' uniforms were made available for needy persons.<sup>86</sup> Immigrants of the Italian "colony" realized by the failure of the band that it was not easy to "transplant" some of the fine cultural aspects of their heritage. The Italian emigration had not brought to Fort William very many professional and educated persons that could have spearheaded other forms of familiar cultural activities.

In their efforts to maintain strong group identity the members of the Principe Di Piemonte eventually had to take into consideration their children who were being

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1920.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., May 1921.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1924.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1927.

educated in Canadian schools. These children were slowly losing the ability to communicate in Italian. In an effort to correct the situation the Society took the initiative in 1933 and organized Italian language classes for the young people of the "colony". These classes were held once or twice a week in the premises of the Society and students were expected to pay a small sum of 50¢ per month to offset the cost of paying the salaries for one or two teachers.<sup>87</sup> These language classes were designed to provide children with a basic writing and reading knowledge of the Italian language.

Aside from its own interest in promoting Italian language classes for the children of the "colony", the Principe Di Piemonte was also being encouraged by the Italian Government, through their local Agente Consolare, Emilio Marino, to organize these language classes. The Italian Government as part of its promotional activities requested pictures of these language classes.<sup>88</sup> After 1925 the Fascist Government considered all Italian immigrants to be citizens of Italy, and even those that were overseas temporarily were expected to support Fascist activities.<sup>89</sup> Given this policy it was natural that there would be a diplomatic effort to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., January 19, 1933; The two instructors were Clara Brunetti and Attilio Naseimbeu.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., March 31, 1933.

<sup>89</sup> Evans, op. cit., p. 29.

promote Italian culture abroad. In Fort William, however, the language classes during the 1930's were not particularly successful, and were poorly attended. Although the Principe Di Piemonte had recognized the value of having Italian children maintain the language of their parents the Society was not making a great effort to ensure the success of this project. Indeed in 1936 the Society was no longer prepared to sponsor these classes because of the costs involved. The Italian Embassy in Ottawa urged the Society through Emilio Marino to reorganize language classes. The Society executive discussed this matter and agreed to do so provided the Italian Government would provide the necessary materials including paying the salaries of the instructors.<sup>90</sup> There is no indication that this tough reply to the request may have in part stemmed from some resentment against Italy's recent takeover of Ethiopia.

Eventually, on January 24, 1937 word was received that the language classes would be financed by the Italian Government. The Italian authorities were prepared to pay for the salary of the teacher and would also make available the necessary books to the students free of charge. The Society was expected to provide a room with tables for the

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<sup>90</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, July 2, 1936.

class. Frank Cerra proposed that members children would be admitted free while children of nonmembers would be required to pay a fee of 25¢ per month.<sup>91</sup> At this point, in 1937, the intervention of the Italian Government was a crucial factor in the maintenance of Italian language classes.

In conjunction with its auxiliary Women's Society the Principe Di Piemonte also tried to provide for the children of the community a traditional Asilo Infantile (a class for preschool children). Parents who wanted to enroll their children were required to pay a sum of 50¢ per week. A supervisor hired to take charge of the children was paid a salary of \$20.00 per month.<sup>92</sup> Initially these classes were held in the Society's premises.<sup>93</sup> In October, 1933 this class was moved to the basement of the Chiesa Italiana (St. Dominic's Church) but the Society retained control over the class.<sup>94</sup> The Asilo Infantile came to an end in 1934 when Clara Brunetti who was in charge of the class resigned from her post.<sup>95</sup>

One of the recurring themes of concern that surfaced

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1937.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1933.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., October 1, 1933.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., October 8, 1933.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1933; June 1, 1934.

within the organization of the Principe Di Piemonte was that the Italian "colony" project a respectable impression to the popolo di fuori (outside people i.e. non-Italians). Many members felt that the Society was at the forefront of the "colony" and that it ought to do everything in its power to promote the "good" image of the Italians. This concern gained momentum particularly during the decade of the 1930's when many men were unemployed and "foreigners" tended to be resented by unemployed Canadians.<sup>96</sup> Under these circumstances many members of the Society expressed the feeling that it was imperative for Italians to behave in a respectable manner so as to maintain good relations with the popolo di fuori. Increased idleness and its subsequent psychological consequences were likely to have an adverse effect on social behaviour. The Society offered a number of recreational outlets that could help to channel some of the energies of the unemployed into acceptable directions. In 1931 for the first time the books held by the Society's Library were made available to the general Italian public. There was no charge for borrowing the books provided that they were returned within two weeks.<sup>97</sup> In 1934 the executive made an effort to provide the Italian "colony" with some entertainment by planning public meetings for every third

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<sup>96</sup>Grayson and Bliss, op. cit., p. xxlv.

<sup>97</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, March 31, 1933.

Sunday where a few orators would appear.<sup>98</sup> A member proposed and won support to organize an ongoing contest of tresette (a popular Italian card-game) that would take place one Sunday per month.<sup>99</sup> This type of inexpensive indoor recreational activity was also particularly suited to combat the long winters that Italian immigrants were not accustomed to. From time to time the Society tried to show films to the entire "colony".<sup>100</sup> Young members of the Society also received special assistance to purchase sports equipment.<sup>101</sup> Of course throughout the 1930's the Society held numerous dances to mark traditional feast days or simply to raise funds.<sup>102</sup>

The Society was always cautious in all its activities in order to avoid mistakes that could prove to be embarrassing to the Italian "colony". Official functions of the Principe Di Piemonte were to be conducted with the utmost efficiency and precision.<sup>103</sup> It was also not uncommon from time to time

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., January 5, 1934. There is no further information as to what kind of orators were sponsored.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., January 7, 1934.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., March 2, 1934.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., May 3, 1935.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., February, 1935.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., March 1, 1931.

for the membership to be lectured by the Society's President or some other official on the theme of proper conduct. In 1934 the President, Frank Cerra, talked at length about the value of social discipline. He called upon members to regulate their conduct according to the code of the Society at all times.<sup>104</sup> The constitution of the Society outlined a number of specific measures which were designed to promote a respectable image of the Society and ultimately of the Italian "colony" to the rest of the community. Members were to avoid discussion of matters concerning the Society in public. They were to obey "blindly" the officials of the Society on matters regarding the organization. During meetings no one was to smoke, "squawk", pronounce obscene words or resort to sarcastic language and no one was to leave the room without the permission of the President. Members were also prohibited to enter the premises of the Society under the influence of alcoholic beverages.<sup>105</sup> After having reminded the members of this code of conduct Cerra warned that at times there could be present at their meeting persone foreste (strangers) and so proper behaviour was essential to be maintained. Discipline, he stated, was

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., October 7, 1934.

<sup>105</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, Articles 67, 68, 104, 105, 70.

the sure key that would render honour to the Society and to the entire Italian "colony".<sup>106</sup> The President at a later meeting in the month of October, 1934 announced that a programme would be inaugurated whereby every third Sunday of the month the members would meet to receive basic instructions regarding morality and good behaviour. This programme was thought to be necessary to improve the public image of the Principe Di Piemonte.<sup>107</sup>

The theme of promoting high morals was deep rooted in the membership of the Society. A departing member, A. Boffa, in an address to his fellow members in 1934 urged them to maintain unity within the organization and to continue to display high standards of morality for the honour of the entire Italian "colony".<sup>108</sup> Promoting a high standard of morality within the Italian "colony" was considered by many members to be the prime task of the Principe Di Piemonte.<sup>109</sup>

The constant concern for promoting such conduct within the Italian "colony" did not arise from any previous

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<sup>106</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, October 7, 1934.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., October, 1934.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., March 4, 1934.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., May 6, 1934.

utopian conception of the world that the Italian immigrants had brought with them. This ethos had developed from a sense of duty to advance the good reputation of the Patria and more importantly to win the admiration or at least the acceptance of Canadian society. In constantly promoting social responsibility the Principe Di Piemonte helped to generate group pressure upon individuals and in this manner the institution became a formidable agent of social control within the Italian "colony".

In Fort William the Italian immigrants were aware that they were perceived as "foreigners" and this awareness also encouraged them to maintain strong group relationships with the ultimate view of becoming more acceptable to Canadian society. This feeling was well articulated in the introduction to the constitution of the Society:

In doing this, with sincere enthusiasm and with much energy, always looking for the good and the progress of the Society, let us keep firmly in mind the thought to do honour to ourselves, to honour our Motherland, that far away village [a metaphor meaning country] that saw us being born and that witnessed the birth and the death of so many great men, a land envied by all nations, the garden of the World: and there is no doubt that any other worthy son of Italy in Fort William or in the area, would like to bring us material and moral help so that we can attain our noble and high aims in order to make us much more acceptable to the Great Village [meaning Country] that has received us.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Statuto E Regolamento, p. 5 (my translation).

While the founders of the Society had organized themselves partly in order to win acceptability in Canadian society they were also determined to keep the Principe Di Piemonte as a basically immigrant institution. The founders did not foresee an early end to the flow of Italian immigrants into the "colony" and for this reason they wanted to guard against having the descendants of Italian immigrants gain control over the Society in the future. It was felt that after a few generations Italo-Canadian descendants would no longer identify with the needs and aspirations of other Italian immigrants that would arrive in Fort William. This concern was reflected in the admission regulations of the Society. No one that was not Italian or of Italian descent was to be admitted as a member of the Society. Italians or their descendants with Canadian or American citizenship could join the organization; however, Canadian or American Italian descendants beyond the fourth generation were excluded.<sup>111</sup> This approach to the long term development of the Principe Di Piemonte is in striking contrast with that of the Swedish Sick Benefit and Funeral Aid Society:

Any person between the ages of 16 and 20 and of Swedish descent, or who through marriage or relationship is connected with Scandinavians living in Port Arthur or surrounding districts, may become a member of this Society.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Articles 15-16, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup>Constitution of the Sick Benefit and Funeral Aid Society--Norrskenet (Northern Light), p. 13.

The founders of this Swedish organization demonstrate that they were much more willing to integrate into Canadian society. They did allow persons who were related through marriage to become members and at the same time they saw no need to exclude future descendants of Swedish Canadians. Neglect to make the necessary provisions in the constitution to deal with non-Italian men who would marry Italian girls demonstrates that the founders of the Principe Di Piemonte expected the Italian "colony" to remain homogeneous. Integration with the rest of the community was neither expected to occur nor sought.<sup>113</sup>

While the policies of the Principe Di Piemonte discouraged integration with the rest of the community its actions suggest that there was an equally strong desire not to keep the Italian "colony" in perpetual isolation. In this regard the founders of the Society had made a provision in the constitution which placed no restrictions on the nationality of the honorary members or honorary officers.<sup>114</sup> Honorary membership was usually granted to politicians and

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<sup>113</sup>Throughout the years intermarriages did take place, however, an amendment to the entrance regulations of the Society was not made until 1954. A motion was then passed that would allow all the stranieri (foreigners) that had married daughters of members to join but they would not be allowed to have a vote or hold any executive position. Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, January 17, 1954.

<sup>114</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, Art. 115, p. 26.

particularly the mayor of the city. The Society usually took every opportunity to react to community affairs with gestures that were designed to show the deep respect that the Italian "colony" had for Canadian institutions. On Remembrance Day the Society always fulfilled its duty by sending a delegation to present a wreath at the official ceremonies. Care was also taken to send a wreath when local dignitaries died. In January, 1936 the Society sponsored a Catholic Mass in remembrance of the death of King George.<sup>115</sup> The Principe Di Piemonte also agreed to participate in a parade in honour of the coronation of King George VI that was scheduled for May 12, 1937.<sup>116</sup> All these actions by the Society were predicated on the desire not to integrate into society at large but to become simply acceptable immigrants.

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<sup>115</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, January 31, 1936.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1937.

## CHAPTER VI

### ITALIAN IMMIGRANT LIFE

It is ironic that in North America the contadini were labelled as "foreigners" whereas in their native towns they and their families were known as americani. Living within the confines of Fort William's "foreign quarters", the Italian immigrants sought to cope in their new society by aggressively retaining their traditional lifestyles and by taking strong pride in their country of origin. This approach was not aimed at offending the rest of the community but rather it was thought that the rest of the community would be impressed with proper manifestations of Italian culture and in turn they would be viewed favourably in the new land. In other words, by improving the status of the Italians as a distinct ethnic group, then and only then acceptance and respectability would be granted to them. Few were the Italian individuals who deviated from this ethos in the course of social adjustment in Fort William, and sought to live outside the group's social structures. Local and international events complicated the adjustment process but the determination of the Italian immigrants

to be accepted allowed them to cope with tense circumstances.

One of the most damaging social phenomenon which haunted the reputation of most Italian communities in North America was crime.<sup>1</sup> It was not long before rumours that the dreaded Black Hand organization had made its way to Fort William's "Little Italy" via the United States. The Black Hand, of course, was an Italian criminal organization that specialized in extortion. The event was dramatically announced to the community.

On January 16, 1909 a headline in the local newspaper read "Black Hand Has Appeared In Fort William And Port Arthur--Several Residents of Foreign Quarter Receive Letters From Dreaded Order." The article went on to say that the authorities of both cities were aware that a number of weeks earlier a branch of this criminal extortion order had set up its operation. The community at large was, however, reassured that the order would victimize Italians only. A number of what the paper called respectable Italians had already received extortion letters with threats of having their homes being set afire if they failed to comply. According to the paper, because of the number of sinister letters that were circulating, Italians in the "foreign quarter" were growing suspicious of fellow countrymen and

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<sup>1</sup>Nelli, op. cit., p. 125.

were confiding only with those they knew well.<sup>2</sup> This approach, however also had its risks as one Italian merchant had discovered. According to the article, John Vesh an Italian who operated a bakery shop in Port Arthur had received several extortion letters each one written over the insignia of a hand drawn in black ink. Terrified he confided his fears to a fellow Italian by the name of Parchilel (the name also appears in the article as Parcailel). Parchilel soon conspired to exploit Vesh's position and engaged a friend by the name of Raffio who effectively posed as a member of the Black Hand. Vesh, terrified more than ever, paid \$500 to Parchilel who promised to protect the dealer. Eventually Parchilel was brought to court and was given a prison term of twenty-three months. However, Vesh was able to recover only half of the amount that he had been defrauded of.<sup>3</sup>

A follow-up front page article, "Live in Fear of Black Hand--", appeared two days later on January 18th. The public was informed that an Italian citizen of good standing had informed the police chief that there were definitely members of the Black Hand in Fort William that

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<sup>2</sup>"Black Hand Has Appeared In Fort William and Port Arthur--Several Residents of Foreign Quarter Receive Letters From Dreaded Order", The Daily Times-Journal, January 16, 1909.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

were terrorizing certain people in the "foreign quarter". This informer wished to remain anonymous, fearing reprisals. He further stated that he did not think that the Black Hand had actually succeeded in extorting any money but thought that it would likely do so in the future. While he claimed to have no knowledge of any individual connected with the order, he did state that the members had likely arrived from the United States during the previous fall. He told the chief of police that it would be impossible for the local police to try to arrest these people until they had committed a serious crime. The police could not expect to receive much information from victims of the order as they were likely to be too afraid to volunteer information. In the meantime he assured the chief of police, a newspaperman and the other listeners present at the briefing that the English-speaking community should not worry since the Black Hand "preys entirely upon its own race."<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to know, of course, whether the threatening letters were actually originating from a genuine Black Hand order or whether it was the work of some individuals who merely wanted to have fun by playing jokes on certain individuals. At least one of the early immigrants to Fort

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<sup>4</sup>"Live in Fear of Black Hand--Well Known Local Italian Thinks Order Came Here From the United States", Ibid., January 18, 1909.

William, Demetreo Labate in a recent interview confirmed that in these early years of the century there was an authentic Black Hand branch in Fort William.<sup>5</sup> Certainly at the time that these stories broke in 1909 there was great apprehension on the part of Italian immigrants in discussing the issue with the press.<sup>6</sup>

The affair of the Black Hand, whether provoked by a real formal criminal organization, or merely by a few frustrated individuals who wanted to break the monotony of the long idle winter, had a lasting and damaging effect for the Italians of Fort William. Every humble Italian became a potential suspect of criminality as the membership of the order was believed to include amongst its most active members persons who held regular day labourer jobs in the community.<sup>7</sup> This type of publicity, however accurate, could not help but further socially isolate the members of "Little Italy" from the rest of the English-speaking community.

The overcrowding in the "foreign quarter" was likely to be viewed with added suspicion by the Anglo-Canadian community. An article in the Port Arthur daily warned that the development of semi-slum areas in the community would become as slums had in other cities had, effective refuges

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<sup>5</sup>Morrison, "Community and Conflict", p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>The Daily Times Journal, January 16, 1909.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

for the worst of criminals and the place where vice would breed best.<sup>8</sup> This correlation of slum, or at least congested living quarters, and crime remained for many years a divisive force in the community. For instance, John Defeo, son of an Italian immigrant who grew up in the East End, in commenting about crime in that part of the city stated:

Well the only difference was that the little bit of crime that was in the East End was always well publicized but anywhere else it wasn't. Half of the crime committed in the East End wasn't by an East Ender either, but if it was in the East End it was well publicized and it didn't matter whether they knew who it was or not he was an East Ender, but anywhere else you didn't hear about it that much.<sup>9</sup>

The East End, in part promoted by the Black Hand affair, acquired a reputation of mystery, toughness and even criminality. This reputation diminished the chances of even the second generation Italians interacting with youth from outside the "foreign quarter". The popular concept of the nature of the East End discouraged Anglo-Canadian youth from venturing into the "foreign quarters". Commenting on how it was to be brought up in the East End John Defeo noted:

Well of course we were all foreigners. We were born in this country but we were all foreigners . . . you accepted this, there was nothing else about it . . .

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<sup>8</sup>Port Arthur, Daily News, March 16, 1912, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Lakehead University Archive 186a, Tape No. 8. Jean Morrison, "Labour History Casette Tapes: Interview with J. Defeo (b. Fort William, 1910)."

Of course, nobody would dare come down the East End. We were a bunch of monsters! . . . I think we were the best organized outfit in town. We had a playground, and we didn't call it peewee hockey but we called it hockey for kids and baseball for kids in the late twenties and early thirties when it was never heard of it before . . . so, we as far as sports were concerned, we were way ahead of them but they always figured we were a bunch of monsters down there East End. You just didn't go down in the East End because they might clean up on you.<sup>10</sup>

The social distance then which is typified by the notion of "we" (meaning Italo-Canadians and other "foreigners" of the East End) and "they" (meaning Anglo-Canadians) was another indication that there was little assimilation on the Milton Gordon's model occurring even amongst the second generation Italo-Canadians.

Assimilation, according to Milton Gordon, requires seven subprocesses. The first and most superficial is what he calls acculturation, meaning the acquisition by a minority group of the extrinsic cultural traits of the dominant group. Traits such as the manner of dress, behaviour, and the acquisition of the language of the dominant group make up the acculturation subprocess. In order for total assimilation to be achieved there has to take place the remaining six subprocesses or what Gordon terms "structural" assimilation which involves the minority group in such interaction as intimate and primary relationships with

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

members of the dominant group. This generally occurs when the minority group becomes acceptable in social cliques and clubs and in all social relationships including intermarriage. Gordon's construct further recognizes that while it is generally the case that the barriers to social interaction are implemented by the host society it also happens that the immigrant group or elements of it likewise may wish to erect barriers.<sup>11</sup> When Gordon's theoretical model is applied to this study only numerous structural barriers impeding assimilation are evident.

Most of Fort William's Italian immigrants living in a segregated part of the city amongst a heterogeneous population of "foreigners" and cut off from the culture of the dominant group, or Anglo-Canadians reacted by setting up formal barriers designed to maintain primary interaction within the group. Entrance to the Società Italiana Di Benevolenza, Principe Di Piemonte, which was the first and leading social institution of "Little Italy", was restricted by its constitution to Italians and their descendents. This restriction was well enforced as new applicants were required to undergo a formal procedure. They were required to fill out a form stating their birth place and other relevant inform-

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<sup>11</sup>Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 61-83.

ation. Acquired Canadian or American citizenship was not a barrier to those of Italian origin. Those of Italian descent could also gain membership but those who were beyond the fourth generation were to be excluded.<sup>12</sup> This stipulation was clearly aimed at preserving a strong Italian ethnic identity for a long time to come. Within the heterogeneous immigrant world of the turn of the century the typical Italian immigrant did not consider assimilation to be a possibility in one's lifetime. The only alternative that appeared practical and even desirable was to strengthen intergroup ties.<sup>13</sup>

The Italian immigrants' lack of contact with the dominant group at the social level was accentuated at the work place. In labour-intensive industries the Italians usually were to be found working side by side with fellow compatriots.<sup>14</sup> Stewart noted that in Fort William's "Little

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<sup>12</sup>Statuto E Regolamento Della Societa Italiana Di Benevolenza: Principe Di Piemonte, 1909, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Writing on Italian emigration at the turn of the twentieth century King and Okey make the point that generally the Italian immigrant maintained a strong affection for his native land and culture: ". . . he refuses to be absorbed as the German does, by the environing race; he has all the Englishman's tenacious love of the language and customs of the mother country." King and Okey, op. cit., p. 318.

<sup>14</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 8; Bradwin observed that in isolated work camps Italian navvies preferred to be in the company of fellow compatriots: "There is something in the companionship of the big gang that appeals to an Italian. He works best alongside his compatriots where he can still dwell within the sound of his mother tongue." Bradwin, op. cit., p. 110.

Italy" there was little interaction taking place with the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture and that the social and political forces were having little success in the "Canadianization" of the Italian adult immigrants.<sup>15</sup>

When informal face-to-face contact was made with English-speaking Canadians, often the Italian immigrant was confronted with prejudice. According to Michele Salatino Canadian "bar bums" often would not hesitate to insult an Italian by calling him a "dago", whereas, he found that the educated Inghlesi such as lawyers and doctors did not show outward discrimination.<sup>16</sup> Joe Baratta commenting on the early social contact of the Italian immigrants in the Twin Cities with elements of the dominant group also vividly describes such encounters: "Often they called you [Italians] dago, dago. They had nothing else to say and called us dago, dago. Sometimes certain Italians would respond with their fists and then the insults would stop."<sup>17</sup> Under these circumstances the Italian immigrants could plainly see the value of enhancing their relationships within the social perimeters of "Little Italy".

Hughes and Kallen argue that once a system of ethnic

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<sup>15</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Taped interview with Michele Salatino.

<sup>17</sup>Taped interview with Joe Baratta (my translation).

stratification has been established, friendly inter-ethnic relations between members of the dominant and minority groups are possible, but as in the case of Salatino's account of the Fort William experience, these warm relations tended to be confined to formal situations of interaction. These relations are not generally extended to the private or intimate relations which are kept within the ethnic group. This dual model of social relations accentuates the social distance between the dominant and the minority groups.<sup>18</sup>

The adjustment process was also influenced by the contadini's general inability to acquire quickly even a working knowledge of the Canadian-English language. The high illiteracy rate amongst them coupled with the general practice of working in groups among their own compatriots explains their dilemma in this sphere. In addition, as Stewart found in his survey in 1913, there were no appropriate programmes to meet the language training needs of the adult immigrants in Fort William.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Frank Ventrudo recalls that there was a tendency on the part of the Italians to neglect night language classes. He recalls that in the year 1917 he was the only Italian in an adult

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<sup>18</sup>R. David Hughes and Evelyn Kallen, The Anatomy of Racism: Canadian Dimensions (Montreal, Harvest House, 1974), pp. 131-132.

<sup>19</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 8.

class at Central School learning English.<sup>20</sup> There is no question, however, that the low literacy rate of the contadini militated against them acquiring their second language. When in 1921 Vincenzo Brescia, who had been fortunate to have received one year of formal education, arrived at Fort William from Italy he found that among his compatriots, "there were some who knew a few words of English, but what they knew was a distorted version. They were illiterate people and how could they help you when you had to visit a doctor?"<sup>21</sup>

In order to cope with the problem of lack of a working

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<sup>20</sup>Taped interview with Frank Ventrudo. In isolated work camps the Italian navvies, while they were fond of working amongst fellow compatriots and to be in constant range of their native language, also displayed an eagerness to acquire the basic rudiments of the English language. Bradwin was astonished to see Italian workers who were often illiterate being willing to learn during the hours of rest after a full work day. Bradwin, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>21</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia, September 3, 1974 (my translation); In a recent study of the Italians of Toronto it has been found that the English language remains the greatest obstacle which prevents their acculturation. Jansen attributes this difficulty to the low educational background of the Italian immigrants. Clifford J. Jansen, "The Italian Community In Toronto", in Elliott J. L. (ed.), Immigrant Groups -- Minority Canadians. Vol. 2 (Scarborough: Prentice Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1971), p. 214; As in Fort William, the Italians in Canada were generally handicapped by the problem of illiteracy. In 1925 when Arnold Cipolla, an Italian traveller and writer visited Vancouver, he writes that a Mr. Polet, whose full Italian name was Poletti, and a merchant in Vancouver urged the rare Italian guest to accept his company and not the company of others. Polet told the visitor that he had a certain right

knowledge of the English language the Italian immigrants turned to the few people who had acquired an adequate level of competence in the English language. One of the more important persons who acted as an intermediary was Cavaliere (Cavalier) Emilio Marino.<sup>22</sup> Prior to the Great War he opened an office in the East End and provided a variety of services for the contadini. He provided banking and postal services, that is, he would dispatch money to Italy through the regular banks on behalf of the Italians who, due to their lack of a working knowledge of the English language and in many cases being illiterate, found it easier to deal with an intermediary who understood them. In addition, Marino could sell the Italian householders insurance for their houses.<sup>23</sup>

The status of Cavaliere Marino in the East End was enhanced just prior to the outbreak of the First World War when the Italian authorities appointed him Consular Agent.<sup>24</sup>

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to his company since he claimed to have graduated as a lawyer and was an intellectual while the rest in the Italian community hardly knew how to write their own names. Arnold Cipolla, Nell' America Del Nord: Impressioni Di Viaggio In Alaska, Stati Uniti E Canada (Torino: Stamperia Reale, G. B. Paravia, 1925), p. 119.

<sup>22</sup>This writer has not been able to uncover much biographical data on Marino except that he had come from the general area of Naples. He died in November, 1949. Interview with Julia Marchiori, May 1, 1977; Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, November 9, 1949.

<sup>23</sup>Taped interviews with Filomena Truisi and Michele Salatino.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., Michele Salatino.

When the hostilities commenced in Europe, the Italian Government drafted Italian immigrants through his office. Few of the immigrants were enthusiastic about returning to fight a war. Many of them had only recently left Italy in a hurry to avoid reaching the military drafting age and in Fort William some were successful in avoiding the call to take up arms.<sup>25</sup>

Tony Fogolin who had arrived in 1913 left for Italy in 1915 for a combination of reasons, the most powerful one being a threat of having to live in exile in Canada. Marino, the Consular Agent, informed him that failure to return to Italy to enlist in the army, in the event that the motherland lost the war, would result in the immigrants who had not fulfilled their duty not being permitted to return home until they reached forty years of age. Having fresh memories of his parents and feeling uncomfortable in a foreign land where he could not even speak the language, Fogolin could not take a chance of becoming an exile. Also in 1914 the economic slump had thrown Fogolin out of work and the free trip to Europe that the Italian Government was ready to provide seemed to offer an escape from the misery of living on relief.<sup>26</sup>

Having gone to the rescue of the motherland, Fogolin

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<sup>25</sup>Taped interviews with Giuseppe Guarasci and Angelo Todero.

<sup>26</sup>Taped interview with Tony Fogolin, May 7, 1976.

took the opportunity to find a girl friend whom he quickly married. After a month of marriage, he left her behind in Italy in 1919 and came directly to Fort William to work and accumulate the necessary funds to set up a household in the East End where his wife would eventually join him in 1923. At the port of Naples prior to embarking for Canada, in a formal ceremony, he and the others who had returned to the Patria from overseas were given an official thanks. Each man received a certificate which ironically stated how the immigrants had voluntarily returned home to defend the cause of the motherland.<sup>27</sup>

In the post-war era Emilio Marino continued in his rôle as an intermediary. Meanwhile as the children of the immigrants grew and went through school, they began to help their parents in matters of communicating with the English-speaking community.<sup>28</sup> Of course, while having intermediaries at home alleviated the communication problem, some negative affects also emerged in having the children act as the link with North American society. The problem was perceived in 1922 by Cecil King, then the Superintendent of a Methodist mission house located in the East End, who

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<sup>27</sup>The document stated the following: "At the motherland's call to arms, he hastened diligently from across the ocean, daring the snare of the enemies' ships and submarines. He took part commendably in the fight for the defense and completion of the National Unity, meriting the gratitude of the nation." (my translation). This document is in the possession of Tony Fogolin.

<sup>28</sup>Taped interview with Julia Marchiori.

noted:

Imagine a situation where for block after block not an English-speaking home is found. Mothers are unable to speak English, fathers have but a small working knowledge of the language and even briefer acquaintance with many of our fundamental laws and institutions. Here their Canadian-born children have to become the interpreters, a proceeding which dangerously undermines parental authority.<sup>29</sup>

The dependence of parents upon their children who served as vital links with the new society disrupted traditional family structure. This was another of the unpleasant hardships that the Italian immigrants had to suffer in their new society.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the children, other key persons such as Julia Marchiori, who was brought up in the East End, voluntarily helped throughout the years numerous Italian immigrants to communicate with the courts, lawyers, police etc.<sup>31</sup>

In 1913, Bryce Stewart had warned that in a matter of a few years the non-Anglo-Saxon element would compose half of the entire population of Fort William, and unless they were "Canadianized" and their economic status raised they

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<sup>29</sup> Cecil King, "Christianity in the Coal Dock", Missionary Leaflet Series No. 2, The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada, 1922. The writer is indebted to Mr. R. Earl Buckley for having made available this and other documents relating to this Protestant institution, whose role in "Little Italy" will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Harney and Troper, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Taped interview with Julia Marchiori.

would inevitably mar the life of the community.<sup>32</sup> By 1925, when out of a total population of 23,000 over 8,000 were non-Anglo-Saxons, their material conditions had changed little since 1913. The area of "Little Italy" was still the most congested area of the city. Houses were in short supply and consequently rents were high. When Foster visited "Little Italy" in 1925 she found it to be physically "uninviting" as conditions were similar to the ones Bryce Stewart had found over a decade earlier. Entire families, whose income depended on seasonal employment, still crowded into one-room shacks, which were poorly built, without proper sewers and still sitting on lanes. These dwellings were hardly adequate to meet the harsh Canadian winters.<sup>33</sup>

Public works designed to provide normal services to the "foreign quarters" were long neglected. This meant that even in the 1920's the Italians lived in an area that in addition of being physically "uninviting" was in the opinion of some, even unhealthy:

The rest of the area "Coal Dock" has shallow ditches into which all drainage is received and where, owing to the slight degree of fall, it often lies stagnant.

Much of the subdivision is unfit for human habitation, nevertheless it is thickly settled. Foreigners, many of them not yet to be called "New Canadians", live here . . . . In summer the infant mortality is exceedingly high. Open drains for sewers and the uncovered milk

<sup>32</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup>Foster, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

with flies everywhere--and the deadly work is done.<sup>34</sup>  
To an Italian immigrant arriving by train and with great expectations of what America was going to be like, his approaches to the East End proved to be disappointing as "Little Italy" gave the appearance of a concentration camp.<sup>35</sup>

In this "concentration camp" the agrarian background of the Italians became an asset when economic conditions fluctuated and men were unable to find employment. For instance, when in 1924-25 jobs were scarce, the diet of the average Italian consisted largely of potatoes, which they grew on their own. However, even potatoes were not plentiful as the gardens had been flooded by excessive rain and the potato crops had been damaged.<sup>36</sup>

Although employed in industry, most Italians of the East End carried out considerable agricultural activity to provide for their family's needs. Their back yards were crowded with pigs, goats, chickens, rabbits, ducks, and cows. In addition, they rented lots from the municipality in the area known as Intercity which lay in the vicinity of the East End. They paid 50¢ per plot per year and planted

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<sup>34</sup>King, "Christianity in the Coal Dock", p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Bresica (b. 1898 Grimaldi, Province of Cosenza) August 30, 1974.

<sup>36</sup>Foster, op. cit., p. 68.

plenty of potatoes and other vegetables.<sup>37</sup> Aside from meeting economic needs this pursuit of agriculture was also a sign that the contadini clung to the agrarian lifestyle they had known in rural Italy.

The quest to re-establish a familiar way of life in "Little Italy" gave rise to a number of Italian grocers who specialized in retailing traditional Italian foods in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> There was a general consensus among the immigrants that the seven or eight fellow countrymen who operated these businesses were exploiting them. In addition these storekeepers were greatly resented because they often refused to give credit during the long winter months when most men were unemployed.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Taped interviews with Rachela Cemone, Filomena Truisi, Angelo Todero; At the turn of the twentieth century Italian immigrants in Toronto also engaged in the cultivation of plots of land which they purchased at the outskirts of the city. For the most part these patches of land were utilized to grow food for family use. A few Italians, however, did establish commercial truck farms. Robert F. Harney, "Chiaroscuro: Italians in Toronto, 1885-1915", Italian Americana, 1, 2 (Spring, 1975), p. 157.

<sup>38</sup>de Leone, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>39</sup>Taped interview with Tony Fogolin. The seven or eight Italian storekeepers, Brescia still recalls, "were all like ants feeding on a bone. The bone was us. There was little meat on the bone but they were tearing at it the best way they could." Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia (my translation).

Early in 1920 five or six socialist-minded Italians met several times in the hall of the Principe Di Piemonte to discuss the concept of forming a co-operative in order to counter the Italian grocers.<sup>40</sup> By the spring of that year seventy-eight men had bought a \$10 share raising a total of \$780 and on May 1st the Worker's Co-operative was officially opened.<sup>41</sup>

Members of the Co-operative could then buy their food at wholesale prices plus a ten per cent mark up to cover expenses. In 1924 internal differences emerged as to whether it was proper for the Co-operative to sell goods to non-members for a profit. About fifty of the more socialist-minded members who opposed the introduction of the profit scheme withdrew and formed their own Co-operative Economica (Economic Co-operative) in 1925. Unlike the former that was successful the Economic Co-operative lasted only until 1930. Its failure is attributed to bad management, mainly granting too much credit to its members.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Taped interview with Frank Ventrudo.

<sup>41</sup>Taped interview with Angelo Todero. Todero was its first Secretary. The Co-operative was located on 538 McTavish Street. Henderson's, Fort William and Port Arthur Directory, IX, 1923. This Co-operative is still in operation in 1976 and is located at 601 McTavish Street.

<sup>42</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia. Brescia was one of the principal opponents of the introduction of the

Despite conditions in the East End, many Italians decided to stay after all. Their options in the matter were not very attractive. Paradoxically, it was exactly the poverty evident in the East End that in many cases acted as a deterrent to returning to Italy. Even if immigrants had enough money to pay for a return fare home, many were reluctant to return without la fortuna which had been the goal of their mission to America. It was simply too embarrassing to face their paesani in failure. Moreover, they dreaded going back to submit once again to oppressive and semi-feudal agrarian world which they had left. Memories of conditions back home in the semi-feudal society of Southern Italy were not easily forgotten as one immigrant recalls:

To tell you the truth when I left Italy I was a slave. The padroni [landlords] took everything. Then when I left I was 17 years old. I lived in a small town. My family worked land away from the village in a nearby region known as Sila. They were renting this land from a padrone [landlord].<sup>43</sup>

In Fort William, the contadini no longer felt like "slaves".

Vincenzo Brescia who came from the small town of Grimaldi, Province of Calabria, in 1921 following the foot-

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profit-making scheme in the Workers Co-operative and was a member of the Buyers Committee of the Economic Co-operative. The Economic Co-operative was located on 639 McLaughlin Street. Henderson's, Op. cit., XI, 1927.

<sup>43</sup>Taped interview with Michele Salatino, (my translation). Most of the immigrants that the writer has interviewed expressed a similar analysis of the world that they had left in Europe.

steps of his two older brothers recalls that like many others he had come with the intention of working for a few years and then returning. He and others did not do so, however, since rather than making a quick fortune, they were afflicted with unemployment. His decision to send for his family to join him was based on the simple economic principle that even if he worked only a few weeks in a year he found that he could still provide for his family white bread rather than bread made of corn.<sup>44</sup>

Struggling to establish a new way of life in "Little Italy" the contadini continued on their path with little interaction with "Canadian life". In 1925 Foster, much to her dismay, noted that the Italians were still to be found working in groups among their fellow countrymen, particularly in the labour-intensive enterprises such as railroad construction and foundries. In the social sphere the Italians conducted their social life around their own institutions located within the East End. They did not even read the local newspaper. In practice, as Foster noted, the Italians were isolated from their generally "indifferent Canadian neighbours."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Taped interview with Vincenzo Brescia, September 3, 1974; Regardless of the relative nutritious quality, the Italian peasantry saw white bread made of wheat as a luxury that could not be afforded in many instances, and they were compelled at best in Italy to consume bread made of corn. Interviews.

<sup>45</sup>Foster, op. cit., pp. 67-68. Italians who were

The only Anglo-Canadian Protestant institution which was attempting to "develop Christian Canadian citizenship" in the East End was Wesley Institute.<sup>46</sup> This Institute which eventually became known as Wayside House (originally a Methodist and later a United Church mission) was located on 706 McTavish Street in the very heart of the "foreign quarter". This operation was begun in 1912 by the Home Mission Board in response to the challenge to do something amongst the immigrants of the "Coal Dock" area.<sup>47</sup> The thrust of Wayside, as generally perceived by the Italians, was on influencing the "foreigners" and their offspring with "Canadian ideals" rather than conversion.<sup>48</sup>

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literature usually subscribed to Italo-Canadian or Italo-American newspapers which were printed in major North American cities. Interviews.

<sup>46</sup>King, "Christianity in the Coal Dock", p. 1.

<sup>47</sup>Earl R. Buckley, "The Story of Wayside--1912-1973, p. 1. (a four page manuscript made available to me by the Reverend Kenneth Myers of Knox United Church, Fort William; For a short history of Wayside see "Wayside Church Centre Marks 50th Anniversary", Chronicle Journal, December 10, 1973.

<sup>48</sup>Assuming the Italian immigrants correctly perceived the objectives of the Wayside House, then, this institution did not reflect the general approach that the Protestant churches were zealously taking in Canada. As discussed in Chapter II they were overtly attempting to proselytize all non-Protestant immigrants.

The institution organized a number of programmes designed to meet the needs of both the adults and the children. Amongst the first activities which took place were English-language classes, as well as sewing and cooking classes. Some of these programmes were clearly designed to undermine many of the traditional habits of Italians and other "foreigners". For instance the dietary habits and related health matters were of concern to the Wayside personnel:

Many of the old world traits, customs and even superstitions are transplanted, so that we find children ignorant of elementary health habits. One says "My mother won't let me clean my teeth, as that spoils them." Another, "Milk is no good, it makes people fat, but coffee gives them a good color" (complexion). A girl from a home where there are eight children remarked "We have a pint of milk every day, but we usually throw some away as it goes bad." Eight children on less than a pint of milk, and the father a prosperous business man! Later we found two of the children in the hospital with "rickets".<sup>49</sup>

The children of the immigrants were being provided with a host of sports and outdoor activities. In 1925, for instance, a couple of hundred children were participating in such activities.<sup>50</sup>

Wayside was extremely successful in terms of being accepted by Italian immigrants and their offspring. Julia Marchiori who was raised in the East End recalls that boy

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<sup>49</sup> King, "Christianity in the Coal Dock", p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Foster, op. cit., p. 69.

scouts and girl guides in particular were viewed with enthusiasm. Italians took advantage of the kindergarten classes that were held there in the afternoons. Needy Italians went there for aid. "They did not teach you religion only good citizenship . . . that is where we got our education. There I learned public speaking." Then during World War II, Wayside organized a sewing club of elderly ladies to help needy families.<sup>51</sup>

While Italian people found the activities of this institution attractive and harmless, the parish priests Father Murray and Father Venti both viewed this dynamic Protestant institution as a threat to the Catholicism of the members of their flock. Both made it known in their sermons that they would not allow the sacrament of communion to Catholics that participated in Wayside sponsored activities.<sup>52</sup> Worse yet, even the threat of excommunication was aired.<sup>53</sup> These threats failed to curb participation of Italians in Wayside activities. Some ladies, however, could not disregard such serious warnings and cautiously made their way to

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<sup>51</sup>Taped interview with Julia Marchiori.

<sup>52</sup>Interviews with Rachela Cimone and Filomena Truisi.

<sup>53</sup>Taped interview with Julia Marchiori. The aggressive approaches of the Protestant churches to proselytize immigrants elsewhere, as discussed in Chapter II, may in part explain the extreme concern of Fathers Murray and Venti.

Wayside making sure that they were not seen by their priest.<sup>54</sup>

Since Wayside was not overtly applying pressure to the Italians to abandon their Catholic faith they could not comprehend the views of their priests in this matter. Joe Defeo's comments on the role of Wayside and the character of one of its Superintendents, Reverend Cecil King reveal why the Italians were not to be easily convinced to cut their ties with this Protestant institution:

They [the staff at Wayside] were able to offer us something that the Catholic Church didn't . . . sports, organizations, something that kept us from getting into trouble. I believed in it really, as much as the Catholic Church didn't like it . . . Reverend Cecil King who was known as Mr. King at the time . . . was one of the finest men I ever met. He was a true Christian. I would say, ninety-five per cent of the Italians were Catholic in the East End, but by the same token many people went to this place Wayside. My parents were very strong Catholics but we had Mr. King over at our place quite often as a visitor and we thought that he was a very nice person.<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, the various adjustment and recreational programmes offered by Wayside to the newcomers were accepted by the Italians over the objections of their parish priests because "they helped the people to become familiar with Canadian customs and to feel more at home in this, their new country."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Taped interview with Filomena Truisi.

<sup>55</sup>Lakehead University Archive 186a, Taped interview with J. Defeo; Cecil King took charge of Wesley Institute from 1921 to 1926. Buckley, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>56</sup>R. Earl Buckley, op. cit., p. 2.

Being geographically and socially isolated from the outside of the "foreign quarter", the Italians continued to remain inward-looking in order to improve their social life and their individual status within the community. Various steps were taken to enhance the reputation of the Italian community among other citizens. This motive prompted Italian veterans of the Great War to establish an organization in the early 1930's, the Societa Ex Combattenti Italiani (Society of Ex Italian Combattants). To the community at large, the Society was known simply as Canadian Legion -- Italian Branch.<sup>57</sup> One of the original charter members explained that the Italian veterans like the Inghlesi (English) wanted an organization in order to be able to say that the Italians had also fought for something, and to demonstrate that Italians had fought the Great War on the side of Canada and England.<sup>58</sup> The organization operated for the first five years from the premises of the Principe Di Piemonte where the veterans operated a bar in the basement for the purpose of raising funds. In 1937,

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<sup>57</sup>Henderson's, Twin Cities, Fort William and Port Arthur Directory, (1935-1946). In 1947 the name of the institution was changed again due to pressures from the new veterans who thought that the word Italian was no longer suitable since they had fought against Italy. In 1947 the Society became an affiliate of the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League and with its new name: Royal Canadian Legion, Ortona Branch No. 113. Taped interview with Tony Fogolin.

<sup>58</sup>Taped interview with Tony Fogolin, May 7, 1976.

unhappy with the monetary demands of the Principe Di Piemonte the organization decided to build an independent quarter in the next block at 432-4 McLaughlin Street.<sup>59</sup>

This organization then was not so much an expression of entrenchment of Italian nationalism on Canadian soil, but rather was an overture to the new society for acceptance by reminding it that they too had helped Canada in the Great War. Dressed in para-military paraphernalia the Italian veterans marched from the "foreign quarter" joining other legions such as the Slovak and Polish Branches and proudly proceeded to the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies. For the Italian veterans their organization helped them to become involved in community affairs such as the Remembrance Day parades from which they otherwise would have been excluded.

Efforts to acquire respect and distinction in the community at large had up to 1933 remained within the confines of the group's associations and activities. In that year this pattern was widened when an Italian immigrant was appointed as an alderman in Fort William. Frank Charry

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<sup>59</sup> Taped interview with Tony Fogolin. The Canadian Legion (Italian Branch) remained in these quarters until in 1954 when the organization moved to 539 Simpson Street. In 1964 new quarters were acquired on 1700 Dease Street. Henderson's, Twin Cities, Fort William and Port Arthur Directory, 1954, 1964.

(Francesco Cerra) was appointed to the Council as a result of a vacancy; he had been the runner-up in that year's municipal election. He was re-elected in subsequent elections until he was defeated in 1939. In 1940 he was once more re-elected and held office until his death in August 17, 1943.<sup>60</sup>

"Little Italy" could take pride that one of its leading personalities had finally gained access to municipal politics. Recognition of this fact was reflected in the fact that from 1932 until his death Charry was re-elected each year President of the important Italian benevolent society, the Principe Di Piemonte.<sup>61</sup> Charry was a typical early Italian immigrant. He had come to Fort William in 1904 at the age of sixteen from Southern Italy. Upon his arrival he first worked on several construction jobs and at the Ogilvie Flour Mill. For a short time he was involved in the real estate business. In 1911 he started a confectionary store which he operated until his

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<sup>60</sup>The Daily Times-Journal, August 17, 1943. A second Italian alderman, Hubert Badarai was elected 1940-48. Mr. Badarai then served as Mayor 1949-52, 1955-58. In 1958 he was elected to the House of Commons, becoming the first Italo-Canadian M.P. He was re-elected in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1968 and retired from Parliament in 1972. The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1968, p. 163, Spada, op. cit., p. 188. The author is indebted to Mr. Badarai for having provided him with a biographical sketch.

<sup>61</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, 1932-1943.

death.<sup>62</sup>

During the 1930's, international events, and in particular events in Fascist Italy, were also demanding the attention of "Little Italy". Generally speaking, the name of Mussolini provided a sense of glory and of pride to the Italians; many of whom were feeling the gloom of the economic stress of the Depression. Also, because Italian communities in Canada equated fascism with nationalism, and because they were cut off from the mainstream of Anglo-Canadian society due to the language barrier and discrimination, many Italian immigrants welcomed the opportunity to identify with a dynamic leader who was at the forefront of international events. In the wake of the Ethiopian campaign in 1935-36, Italian-born priests and Italian consuls successfully appealed to women to donate their gold wedding rings to help the cause of the Patria.<sup>63</sup>

In Fort William Cavaliere Marino, the Italian Consular Agent, spearheaded a drive to collect gold items from the Italian women of the community and many responded

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<sup>62</sup>The Daily Times-Journal, August 17, 1943.

<sup>63</sup>Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Swastika And The Maple Leaf--Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties (Don Mills: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, 1975), pp. 7, 83; For a description of a Church function where the women donated their gold rings in exchange for steel ones see Bayley, op. cit., pp. 161-162.

with such a donation.<sup>64</sup> Cavaliere Emilio Marino could not expect to receive active support from the priest at the "Italian Church", Reverend Murray, as he was of Irish origin. Marino turned to the Executive of the Principe Di Piemonte to launch an active fund-raising campaign on behalf of the Italian Red Cross. The Executive considered Marino's nobile idee (noble ideas), but concluded that the Society was not in a position to accept this undertaking. They did however, give a donation of \$15.00 for the cause.<sup>65</sup>

The Consular Agent, unhappy with the apparent lack of enthusiasm displayed by the leadership of the Principe Di Piemonte towards his request, threatened to resign from the Society. However, as the Ethiopian conflict raged on, the Executive did take a more favourable attitude towards the question of fund-raising for the Italian Red Cross. For instance, in February, the Society decided that it would hold a feast and that the proceeds would be made available to the Italian Red Cross<sup>66</sup> and consequently, a second donation of \$25.00 was made to it.<sup>67</sup> But for the

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<sup>64</sup>Taped interviews with Julia Marchiori, Rachela Cimone and Filomena Truisi.

<sup>65</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, November 1, 1935; Ibid., November 15, 1935.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., February 28, 1936.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1936; During the two years of the

Consular Agent the two donations did not constitute sufficient support for Fascist Italy's political and colonial affairs. The leadership of the Society, whose chief executive was throughout the years of the Ethiopian conflict forging a political career in local municipal politics, was sensitive to the problem of openly advancing a cause that might influence adversely the reputation of the Italians in their new country of adoption.

Because support of the Fascist Regime in Canada's Italian communities stemmed from sentiments of nationalism and was not based on ideological tenets, many of the women of Fort William who had donated gold items for the Italian Red Cross felt that they had been betrayed by Mussolini when Italy joined Nazi Germany in the war against the Allies on June 10, 1940.<sup>68</sup> Italian nationalism had been promoted all along by the Principe Di Piemonte. Branded with the uncomplementary distinction of being "foreigners", the Society had encouraged the Italian immigrants to take great pride in their native land. In an eulogy-like statement, the Introduction to the Constitution of the Principe Di Piemonte set the tone of the type of attitude that the

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Ethiopian conflict the Society made two yearly donations of \$5.00 to the Canadian Red Cross, Ibid., November, 1935, Ibid., October 4, 1936.

<sup>68</sup>Taped interviews with Julia Marchiori, Rachela Cimione, and Filomena Truisi.

contadini were encouraged to uphold towards Italy:

. . . may it remain imprinted in our mind the thought to do honour to ourselves, to honour our Patria, that distant country that has witnessed the birth and death of many great men, the land envied by all nations, the garden of the World: . . .<sup>69</sup>

The cultural nationalism which the contadini wished to express was not aimed at separating them from the rest of the community. On the contrary, in projecting their heritage they expected to win acceptance and respect from the community. Thus, the all-embracing avowed function of the Principe Di Piemonte was to inspire individuals to do honour for themselves and to honour the Patria and by doing so the Italians would become more acceptable to the "Gran Paese" (Great Country) that sheltered them. In practical terms this would be accomplished by reciprocal material help and through fraternal solidarity.<sup>70</sup> This was the basic approach to adjustment which evolved within the Principe Di Piemonte and which was expounded frequently. It was a framework which provided a clear direction for the conduct of the contadini in a new community and one which definitely helped to strengthen the community life within "Little Italy". Moreover their strong psychological ties with the Patria did not prove an obstacle to their allegiance to Canada when

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<sup>69</sup> Statuto E Regolamento Della Societa Italiana Di Benevolenza: Principe Di Piemonte, 1909, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

its interests clashed with those of Italy, as events during the Second World War showed.

The outbreak of the Second World War placed the Italians of Fort William in a most difficult position. For instance, even prior to the outbreak of hostilities, on January 5, 1939 a member of the Principe Di Piemonte expressed the anxiety felt by the Italians when he voiced his opinion at a meeting of the Society that in light of the world events they all should demonstrate to Canada that they were ignorant of what was happening overseas in order to avoid being disliked.<sup>71</sup> John Defeo, a second generation Italo-Canadian, recalls that in 1940 a fellow worker accused him of being a Fascist since he belonged to the Principe Di Piemonte -- a charge that was greatly resented. Defeo was restrained by a C.P.R. constable from attacking his co-worker "because I would have put a hammer through his [co-worker] head. That really burned me up."<sup>72</sup>

Interested to preserve the "respectability" of the Italian immigrants that it had promoted all along, three days after German troops had invaded Poland, on September 4, 1939, the Principe Di Piemonte pledged that "Little Italy" was

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<sup>71</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, January 5, 1939.

<sup>72</sup>Lakehead University Archive 186a, Tape No. 8.  
Interview with J. Defeo.

without reservations going to be loyal to Canada. On that date a motion was passed that a message be sent to the Mayor of Fort William, the Premier of Ontario, the Prime Minister of the Dominion and the local press informing them that upon examination of the critical world events, the Italians were all ready to help Canada and the British Empire.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the duration of the war the Principe Di Piemonte demonstrated the loyalty of "Little Italy" to Canada by raising funds to purchase Government War Bonds and by providing moral support for local Italians who were serving in the Canadian military. A serious effort to raise funds was started on July 3, 1940 when the Society decided to hold weekly dances and have the entire proceeds be used to purchase War Saving Stamps.<sup>74</sup> "Victory Dances", as these social events became known, involved primarily the younger members of the Society who had been raised or born in Fort William.<sup>75</sup> By the end of December, 1944, the Principe Di Piemonte had purchased \$2,604 worth of War Bonds and certificates and more were purchased in 1945.<sup>76</sup> In addition, loyalty

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<sup>73</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, September 4, 1939.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1940.

<sup>75</sup>Taped interview with Julia Marchiori. August 14, 1974.

<sup>76</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, December 28, 1944; April 8, 1945.

to Canada was also expressed by periodic contributions to the Canadian Red Cross and to the fund to help the victims of the London bombings.<sup>77</sup> In 1943 even a \$100 gift was forwarded to the Canadian Government to help in the War effort.<sup>78</sup>

For the members who were serving in the military the Society exempted them from having to pay their monthly dues.<sup>79</sup> Then in April, 1943 the Society decided to forward a one dollar gift to each Italian of Fort William who was in the services and five dollars to the Italo-Canadian soldiers who were members of the Society.<sup>80</sup> These gestures were intended to show respect to the younger people of "Little Italy" who were called upon to fight for Canada.<sup>81</sup>

These various initiatives taken by the Principe Di Piemonte were designed to prove to the community that the Italian "foreigners" were loyal Canadians after all. Their lingering Italian nationalism had not impeded their obligations to Canada. The authorities, for their part, limited their surveillance of "Little Italy" to the taking

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1940; May 27, 1941.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., January 6, 1943.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., January 28, 1942.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., April 19, 1943.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1942.

of finger prints of Italian males and seizing the records of the Italian Consular Agent, Emilio Marino.<sup>82</sup> The Italians received the assurance of Mayor Ross of Fort William that they were well protected by the local and federal authorities.<sup>83</sup>

In terms of adjustment, the tense war years were a period of accelerated change of perceptions in "Little Italy". Having fully supported Canada at war the Italian immigrants had consciously severed their Italian citizenship. For the offspring, their involvement in the war effort had even more dramatic results as one participant articulates:

Well of course we were all foreigners. We were born in this country but we were all foreigners. On the job where I worked on the railroad I was always referred to as a foreigner, you accepted this, there was nothing else about it. The first time I was regarded as a Canadian was when I came back from the Navy, then I wasn't a foreigner anymore, it seems.<sup>84</sup>

Italian immigrant life in Fort William's East End was characterized, for reasons already stated, by extreme social distance from Anglo-Canadian society. This schism was potent enough to have percolated even down to the second generation Italo-Canadians who still perceived Anglo-Canadians as "they" and themselves as "we". The Anglo-Canadians for their part perceived the Italian immigrants

<sup>82</sup>Taped interview with Tony Fogolin.

<sup>83</sup>Minutes: Principe Di Piemonte, August 13, 1944.

<sup>84</sup>Lakehead University Archive 186a, Tape No. 8. Interview with J. Defeo.

and their offspring as "foreigners" and their residential zone as the "foreign quarter". Under these circumstances the Italians lived a social life within the confines of their own exclusive institutions, making the adjustment from an agrarian semi-feudal background in Europe to North America's industrial capitalist milieu a less painful process. The entrenchment of their traditional way of life quickly furnished the contadini with a strong identity and a sense of community within "Little Italy". The various voluntary organizations which they established reflected the cohesiveness of the Italians of Fort William. Their general acceptance of Wayside House and their later zealous involvement in the Canadian war effort during the Second World War indicate that they also wished to bridge the social distance which existed between "Little Italy" and the host society.

## CONCLUSION

Italian immigration to Fort William as well as to North America in general was not an immigration of families. The movement was composed chiefly of males, usually in their prime years of productive life and from the contadini class. Before leaving Italy the contadini had not expected to establish permanent ties in America. Their intended mission was limited to acquiring a certain amount of money and then to return home as successful americani. Thus, at first most contadini pioneers in Fort William perceived themselves as migrants and not as immigrants. Many of course returned as they had planned. For others it took years and in many cases more than one return visit to the native village before the conclusion to remain in America was reached. This original non-committal dimension of Italian emigration influenced greatly their experience in Fort William.

Not actively seeking at first to establish a permanent relationship with the host society, they found it expedient and socially secure to establish a way of life amongst fellow countrymen as similar as possible to what they had known in Italy. The predominantly male population could find plenty of company in the crowded

boarding houses of "Little Italy" with those who shared similar aspirations and problems. Also, the practice of living in crowded quarters was a calculated economic measure to allow contadini to cope with long periods of unemployment and to allow them to save as much as possible in order that they could return home to their families or be able eventually to bring their families to America.

This austere life style which the contadini adopted in Fort William and in Port Arthur met generally with little understanding from the Anglo-Canadians who at best were concerned that the "foreign" element of the city had marred the beauty of the East End. Others even came to the conclusion that living in slum-like conditions was to the Italians' liking. The two "Little Italies" of the Twin Cities were not viewed as areas where humble people struggled towards realizing goals to improve their lives, but rather as socially undesirable areas with a potential for secret organized crime and violence.

In Fort William's "Little Italy" the contadini clung to a way of life similar to what they had known in their towns of origin. For instance, while they became urban workers, many of them cultivated rented plots of land on the outskirts of the East End and also, to the chagrin of town notables, maintained an abundance of

livestock in their back yards.<sup>1</sup> The practice of families keeping boarders, on the other hand, was a significant deviation from the traditional norm of family life and was, therefore, a major adaptation to a new milieu. These two approaches suggest an eagerness on the part of the contadini to maintain their pre-industrial lifestyle and to make certain adjustments to cope with the new economic and social realities.

Immigration, by making available an abundant supply of cheap and unorganized labour, facilitated the "Robber Barons'" quest to lower wages when the supply of labour exceeded the demand. Contadini were particularly resented by native labour for playing into the hands of the industrialists by accepting the low wages and thus lowering the standard of living for the working class.<sup>2</sup> In the Twin Cities the Italian pioneers' militant role in industrial struggles demonstrates that the above characterization was an oversimplification. In the key strikes which occurred in pre World War I years, it was the Italians who most vigorously challenged the employers and the forces of the state that supported the latter. Ironically, the

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<sup>1</sup>Social Survey of Fort William, 1913, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Royal Commission to Inquire Into the Immigration of Italian Labourers, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

contadini's effective role in industrial disputes earned them the dubious distinction of being a particularly violent "foreign" element. This reputation further separated them from the rest of the community.

The employers at the waterfront of the Twin Cities were not challenged by the existence of a solid class solidarity amongst the workers of many nationalities. It was solidarity based on ethnicity which formed the crux of an effective response to the employers' crude treatment of their heterogeneous work force. Certainly the solidarity which the Italians of Fort William exhibited in the industrial struggles and their involvement in their benevolent society as well as their establishment of two consumer cooperatives clearly disputes the impression that the alleged watchword of the Italian immigrants gave: "each man for himself and God for us all."<sup>3</sup>

Within the context of this milieu which was not altogether friendly, the first formal institution which the Italians formed was the benevolent society, Principe Di Piemonte. For the Italian immigrants this volunteer institution was much more than a club for the sociability of men, rather it was a force which shaped the affairs of

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Spada, op. cit., p. 89.

the "colony". Its first function was to temper the pains and tendencies of social disorganization which the process of emigration had produced. To accomplish this, sense of community had to be established amongst Italians who were strangers from one another. Through this organization, the members institutionalized certain basic norms that had been essential to their communal life in Italy. For instance, the provisions made in the constitution of the Society to ensure a proper accompagnamento funebre (funeral procession) and the annual picnic were two measures designed to bring the "uprooted" immigrant to share both sorrow and joy with the rest of his fellow countrymen and thus reestablish deep ties in the emerging community of "Little Italy". Of course, to make sure that members participated in some of these communal events and particularly in the funeral rite, the Society could muster the moral pressure of the collective and even the financial threat of a fine.

Only through action in the form taken by the Society could the contadini best "transplant" essential features of their culture. In addition to entrenching their way of life, the Principe Di Piemonte also facilitated the working out of a collective approach to adjustment in the host society and generated the type of social pressure necessary for its implementation. The model which they worked out was simple. The Principe Di Piemonte which embodied the collective

will of "Little Italy" was to inspire individuals to do honour for themselves and for the Patria and by doing so it was expected that the Italian immigrants would become more acceptable to the Gran Paese (great country) that now sheltered them. In practical terms this required reciprocal material help and fraternal solidarity.<sup>4</sup> This was the basic framework which guided the Italian immigrants in Fort William.

What made the Principe Di Piemonte a dynamic force in Fort William's "Little Italy" was that this collective in addition to advancing the interests of its members was at all times attempting to improve the welfare of the entire "colony". To the members of the Society, their individual reputation was synonymous with that of the Italians in general. These two interests were not seen as being separate. Over the years from its inception in 1909 to the Second World War, the thrust of its efforts was to protect the reputation of "Little Italy" and to advance its respectability. By constantly expounding on this theme, the Società Italiana Di Benevolenza's latent function was one of an agent of social control within "Little Italy". It was at this institutional level that the immigrants balanced their ties with the Patria and with the host country, Canada. It is not surprising then that the first Italian

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<sup>4</sup>Statuto and Regolamentoo, p. 5.

immigrant in Fort William, Frank Cerra, to rise to local government as an alderman came from the rank of President of the Società Italiana Di Benevolenza.

Throughout the period of this study, the evidence suggests that the emphasis on group solidarity was being fostered with the passing of time. The retention for instance, in the Society's constitution of the clause limiting membership to Italians and not allowing membership to non-Italians married to Italian girls and also barring Italo-Americans beyond the fourth generation suggests that the Italian immigrants were not seeking assimilation. They actively sought only respectability and acceptance as "desirable" immigrants. They retained their identity. In the long and difficult process of adjustment the Principe Di Piemonte both directed and facilitated the process, giving coherence to the "colony".

The other major cultural resource of "Little Italy" was the "Italian Church". While St. Dominic's Roman Catholic Church provided a sense of continuity in the immigrants' lives, it did not play a significant role in secular matters confronting its parishioners. For Italian immigrant the presence of an "Italian Church" caused "response chords to vibrate in sweet memory of their [Italians] homelands."<sup>5</sup> This function in itself can not be underestimated

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<sup>5</sup>Daily News, August 5, 1912.

in terms of preventing anxiety and loneliness in a strange milieu.

The other important personality of "Little Italy" that influenced the life of the "colony" was the Agente Consolare, Emilio Marino. He relentlessly promoted the link with the Patria. Through his efforts and the co-operation of the Society, the social movement of Italian Fascism reached the residents of "Little Italy". Not only the adults, but also the children in some cases received a taste of this social movement. For instance when in during 1933-34 preschool children were attending the Asilo Infantile they could be observed walking to and from their classes that were held in the basement of the Principe Di Piemonte, dressed in Balilla costumes (the apparel of the Italian Fascist youth organization) and cheerfully singing Giovenezza, the Fascist anthem.<sup>6</sup>

In co-operating with Marino's various initiatives the benevolent society was not necessarily expressing a deep commitment to the ideology of Il Duce. Rather, this co-operation was an expression of loyalty to the Patria to whom the contadini were committed to do honour to. When the tense years of the Second World War came, the

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<sup>6</sup>Interview with Julia Marchiori.

members of the Society could feel proud that their past efforts to promote the respectability of the "colony" had prompted the local authorities to prevent a small group of "Canadians" led by a leading citizen of the community from making a foray into "Little Italy" and "boarding-up" the doors of the Principe Di Piemonte whom they suspected it to be a bastion of Italian Fascism. The police stopped this determined body of men at Simpson Street, just as they were about to enter the "foreign quarter". The Principe Di Piemonte was permitted to remain open throughout the War years.<sup>7</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War posed a dilemma for each member of "Little Italy". Each individual had to answer a truly personal question. "Do I support the Patria or do I support Canada?" Determined not to let anything stand in their way from improving their social and economic conditions as the Introduction to their Society had affirmed,<sup>8</sup> their collective approach to the War was immediately resolved to be one of complete loyalty to Canada. Throughout the duration of the War the holding of the "Victory Dances" in the Principe Di Piemonte and the moral support given to the Italo-Canadians serving with the Canadian armed

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Statuto E Regolamento, p. 5.

forces indicates that the ties with Fascist Italy had been more of a cultural nature rather than an ideological one. As the result of the War effort, many second-generation Italo-Canadians in particular, felt that they had proven their "Canadianhood". The link with Italy which Emilio Marino had maintained had provided the immigrants of "Little Italy" with a sense of belonging. He reminded them that they were not just "foreigners" but Italians. Fort William's "Little Italy" thus evolved into a viable social unit, a social unit that was too often not apparent to the rest of the community.

APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## ITALIAN EMIGRATION FROM 1876-1941

Year	Total emigration	Emigration to European countries and to the Mediterranean basin	Transoceanic emigration
1876	108,771	88,923	19,848
77	99,213	77,828	21,385
78	96,268	75,065	21,203
79	119,831	82,545	37,286
80	119,901	86,643	33,258
1881	135,832	94,768	41,064
82	161,562	101,736	59,826
83	169,101	104,818	64,283
84	147,017	90,698	56,319
85	157,193	83,712	73,481
86	167,829	84,952	82,877
87	215,665	85,363	130,302
88	290,736	86,036	204,700
89	218,412	94,823	123,589
90	215,854	102,295	113,559
1891	293,631	106,056	187,575
92	223,667	109,421	114,246
93	246,751	107,769	138,982
94	225,323	113,425	111,898
95	293,181	108,664	184,517
96	307,482	113,235	194,247
97	299,855	127,777	172,078
98	283,715	147,803	135,912
99	308,339	167,572	140,767
900	352,782	186,279	166,503
1901	533,245	253,571	279,674
02	531,509	246,855	284,654
03	507,976	225,541	282,435
04	471,191	218,825	252,366
05	726,331	279,248	447,083
06	787,977	276,042	511,935
07	704,675	288,774	415,901

Year	Total emigration	Emigration to European countries and to the Mediterranean basin	Transoceanic emigration
1903	486,674	248,101	238,573
09	625,637	226,355	399,282
10	651,475	248,696	402,779
1911	533,844	271,065	262,779
12	711,446	308,140	403,306
13	872,598	313,032	559,566
14	479,152	245,938	233,214
15	146,019	79,502	66,517
16	142,364	68,224	74,140
17	46,496	33,483	13,013
18	28,311	24,301	4,010
19	253,224	147,391	105,833
20	614,611	205,372	409,239
1921	201,291	84,328	116,963
22	281,270	155,554	125,716
23	389,957	205,273	184,684
24	364,614	239,088	125,526
25	280,081	177,558	102,523
26	262,396	139,900	122,496
27	218,934	86,247	132,687
28	149,967	79,173	70,794
29	149,831	88,054	61,777
30	280,097	220,985	59,112
1931	165,860	125,079	40,781
32	83,348	58,545	24,803
33	83,064	60,736	22,328
34	68,461	42,296	26,165
35	57,408	30,579	26,329
36	41,710	21,882	19,328
37	59,945	29,670	30,275
38	61,548	33,554	27,994
39	29,489	13,291	16,198
40	51,817	47,467	4,350
1941	8,809	8,809	--

Source: These official statistics for the Italian emigration to European countries and the Mediterranean basin were based on the following: 1876-1903--figures based on forms of approval for the issuing of passports; 1904-1930--numbers of passports released;

1931-1941--statistical coupons enclosed in passports and then retained by the Italian border police. Transoceanic emigration statistics were based on the following: 1876-1903--figures based on forms of approval for issuing passports; 1904-1930--number of passports released; 1931-1941--passenger lists of ships involved in the transportation of emigrants. Italy, Istituto Centrale di Statistica, op. cit., pp. 5, 66.

## APPENDIX B

## ITALIAN EMIGRATION TO CANADA 1879-1940

Year	Departures	Year	Departures
1879	79	1911	9,094
80	45	12	18,991
1881	26	13	30,699
82	76	14	11,589
83	81	15	761
84	265	16	1,532
85	611	17	233
86	1,720	18	69
87	1,632	19	2,185
88	1,347	20	8,475
89	447	1921	3,816
90	67	22	3,846
1891	163	23	7,783
92	211	24	3,459
93	382	25	1,751
94	805	26	3,087
95	783	27	5,034
96	397	28	1,158
97	139	29	1,304
98	328	30	1,335
99	1,021	1931	680
00	1,686	32	339
1901	3,497	33	364
02	2,951	34	343
03	2,528	35	351
04	4,748	36	330
05	5,930	37	343
06	10,032	38	401
07	10,436	39	244
08	5,988	40	74
09	8,786		
10	10,209		

Source: Italy. Istituto Centrale Di Statistica, Sommario Di Statistiche Storiche Italiane 1861-1955 (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1958), p. 66; Until 1878 Italian officials combined departures for Canada with those of the United States. Nitti, op. cit., I, p. 326.

## APPENDIX C

FOUNDERS: SOCIETA ITALIANA DI BENEVOLENZA--PRINCIPE DI PIEMONTE

promoters and founders	founders
Giuseppe Delvecchio	Giuseppe Burrelli
Luigi Salini	Fortunato Ioffredo
Severino Palma	Matteo Fiorito
Domenico Dimeo	Antonia Alfonso
Francesco Colucci	Pietro Gallinetti
Antonio Bambaro	Vincenzo Defilippi
Bosco Dimeo	Pasq. Mastrodomenico
Domenico Grassi	Rosario Greco
Nic. Mastrodomenico	Giuseppe Ricciardi
Pasquale Zanni	Antonia Ricciardi
Nicola Ditoro	Antonia Tedesco
Lorenzo Tirelli	Rocco Leonzo
Antonio Romano	Desiderio Grassi
Carmine Difeo	
Enrico Disalvo	
Carmine Romano	
Felice Mete	
Carlo Alloia	

Source: Statuto E Regolamento, p. 7.

## APPENDIX D

PAST PRESIDENTS: SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI BENEVOLENZA--

PRINCIPE DI PIEMONTE, 1909-1956

President	Term
Giuseppe Del Vecchio	1909-1913
Ricciardi Antonio	1914
Domenico Dimeo	June 1914 - June 1917
Pietro Belluz	June 1917 - January 1918
Emilio Marino	January 1918 - August 1918
Carmine Romano	August 1918 - May 1919
Giuseppe Tucceri	May 1919 - December 1919
Pietro Belluz	December 1919 - December 1920
Giuseppe Tucceri	January 1921 - April 1921
Giuseppe Albertini	April 1921 - May 1921
Felice Troisi	May 1921 - December 1923
Frank Scavarelli	January 1924 - December 1931
Frank Cerra (Frank Charry)	January 1932 - August 3, 1943 (died)
Americo Zuliani	August 1943 - December 1943
Emilio Marino	January 1944 - December 1944
Michele Salatino	December 1944 - January 1956

Source: Minutes; Principe Di Piemonte, 1909 - 1956.

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