Immigrants turned activists: Italians in 1970s Melbourne, by Simone Battiston, Leicester, Troubador, 2012, 168 pp., £14.99, ISBN 978-1780882697

Battiston's study is a thorough account of the crucial events in the history of the *Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie* (FILEF) in Melbourne, Australia, during the 1970s. Based on extensive primary research, including interviews with former and current members and collaborators of FILEF, this study also tries to represent the socio-political dynamics and role played by FILEF within the city's Italian community.

The book begins with an outline of the scale of and reasons behind Italian emigration. Over time, Italian governments had used emigration as a solution to high unemployment. The Italian Left initially supported this policy. From the early 1950s, however, communist propaganda began to criticise the government's policy on emigration and highlighted the phenomenon as a symptom of capitalism's failure.

FILEF was founded in Rome in 1967 in a meeting attended by migrant representatives, progressive MPs and intellectuals including Carlo Levi, who was not only its promoter and first president but also the one who shaped the organisation's manifesto based on his Marxist approach to emigration. In Levi's view, emigration was an act of social exclusion by the Italian state, which not only saw emigration as a way to get rid of unemployed workers, but also did not care for their fate outside Italy. Migrants, therefore, had to work together to fight for their welfare conditions abroad. In this context, FILEF was established to speak on behalf of migrants both in Italy and overseas.

As Battiston shows, FILEF was an immediate success and by 1970 could count 50,000 members. Formally, the organisation was apolitical and open to everyone; however, it kept close ties with the PCI. The latter officially avoided linking itself to FILEF, whose members included people with various left-wing political backgrounds. The PCI, however, viewed FILEF as its ambassador in the migrant world. Not only would FILEF promote grassroots activities in which communists could take part, but it also had the advantage of being able to work with local organisations and institutions even in countries where communists were persecuted. Moreover, the PCI – which presented itself as the champion of the fight against the causes of mass migration – sought to use FILEF to extend its domestic electoral base. In the early 1970s, hundreds of thousands of expatriates went back to Italy to cast their votes. In the case of migrants living in Australia and the Americas, though, this was much more difficult. Hence, in these cases, the PCI wanted to raise migrants' political awareness, hoping that they could persuade their relatives still living in Italy to vote for the hammer and sickle.

Battiston analyses the situation of Italians living in Australia and their early grassroots and political activities 'Down Under'. Here, until 1945, Italians were 'abhorred foreigners' in the eyes of the dominant Anglo-Saxon population. In the post-war period, however, under-population threatened the future of the country. Consequently, the Australian government gradually abandoned its white-British-Australia policy, allowing thousands of non-British and even non-white immigrants into the country. In the 1950s and 1960s, Italians constituted the largest migrant group. Still, the difficulty of getting their qualifications recognised, together with their inability to speak English, often led Italians into low-paid employment, relying on overtime and second jobs to survive.

FILEF flourished in Australia in the early 1970s for a number of reasons. First, a number of left-wing organisations had already been set up in Australia prior to its creation to lobby for the interests of Italian migrants. Second, through the efforts of the Italian Left, there was renewed interest in Italy in the living and working condition of Italians abroad. Third, the early 1970s saw

the first Australian Labor government in 23 years, which encouraged the development of organisations advocating ethnic rights. Finally, the 1970s also saw the arrival in Australia of a new 'post-68' generation of Italian migrants – educated and above all politically conscious. In these very favourable circumstances, FILEF was able to establish its branches, coagulate the diverse sections of the Italian Left in Australia, and start lobbying in favour of the Italo-Australian working class. Through FILEF, hundreds of Italian migrants either began or continued their political activism and were involved in social and cultural activities. FILEF, with the decisive support of the PCI, not only stoked the political consciousness of migrants, but also contributed to their cultural growth.

What emerges throughout the book is the importance of Ignazio Salemi to FILEF's development in Australia. A PCI cadre, Salemi arrived in the country as a FILEF official in early 1974, tasked by the party with promoting the Italian migrant and communist causes. This he did, using his organisational skills to expand and intensify FILEF's political and cultural activities. In the final part of the book, Battiston looks at the media controversy provoked by a 1975 article in the Melbourne-based *Age* newspaper, which suggested that Italian communists (Salemi was named and pictured) were trying to take control of the city's Italian community. The article provoked a wave of anti-communist hysteria that led to cuts in federal government funding and, eventually, to Salemi's deportation in 1977.

In general, Italian-Australian migrant studies have looked at issues such as cultural maintenance, settlement and social integration, neglecting post-war ethnic political activity. Battiston's study responds to this gap in Italian-Australian historiography. Battiston provides us with a picture of the difficulties faced and the results obtained by the political activism within a small-scale community. A chronology of events and a section of 46 pictures conclude this well-researched volume, which represents a successful example of micro-historical research.

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La Repubblica del Presidente. Gli anni di Carlo Azeglio Ciampi 1999–2006, by Rosario Forlenza, Reggio Emilia, Diabasis, 2009, x + 153 pp., €16.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-8103-747-6

In their analyses of the presidency of Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, political scientists have primarily focused on the implications of his repeated intervention in the drafting of government bills and, in so doing, have sought to highlight the limits of and challenges to presidential action. Historians have been more inclined to reflect on Ciampi's peculiar take on matters that required an engagement with the national past. Yet, as Forlenza notes, they have frequently criticised the presidential attempt to articulate a novel interpretation that would act as a twenty-first-century 'civic religion', often failing to see the merits of a discourse based on the notion of 'republican patriotism' aimed at helping Italians to reconnect with and take pride in the country's democratic institutions. *La Repubblica del Presidente* concisely investigates this crucial dimension of Ciampi's term, which makes this study a welcome addition to the existing scholarship.