

The Fascist-Anti-Fascist Struggle in the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario, 1915-1946

Angelo Principe

Volume 106, numéro 1, spring 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050719ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050719ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Principe, A. (2014). The Fascist-Anti-Fascist Struggle in the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario, 1915-1946. *Ontario History*, 106(1), 1–33.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1050719ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine le conflit entre fascistes et anti-fascistes dans l'Ordre des Fils de l'Italie d'Ontario, conflit déclenché par le discours principal au congrès fondateur de l'ordre en 1924, et resurgi dix ans plus tard lors de l'élection d'un fasciste comme « Grand Vénérable ». Nous examinons dans ce contexte une bataille juridique entre le « Grand Consul » de l'ordre et la loge ontarienne de Toronto (conflit qui a concerné tous les membres et, à la fin, la cour suprême de l'Ontario) et l'adoption de législation anti-sémite en Italie. La défaite de l'Italie dans la seconde guerre mondiale a amené l'ordre en 1946 à abandonner son flirt avec le fascisme.

The Fascist-Anti-Fascist Struggle in the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario, 1915-1946*

by Angelo Principe

The struggle between fascists and anti-fascists in the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario (OSIO) and within the Italian community may, for clarity, be divided into five successive phases or stages. The first of these began with the keynote speech delivered by the nationalist Leone Castelli during the founding convention of the OSIO, which was held in Hamilton in 1924. The second phase began with the election of the fascist Dr. Sabetta as Grand Venerable in the sixth convention held at Sault Ste. Marie ten years later. The third stage is marked by the legal confrontation between the Grand Consul of the Order and the Ontario Lodge of Toronto: this confrontation, involving the entire membership of the Order, landed right in the lap of the Supreme Court of Ontario. The anti-Semitic legislation in Italy opened the fourth phase while the fifth and last one began with the Second World War

and ended with the 1946 convention of the OSIO.

A brief discussion of the numbers and the social structure of Italians as well as their stage of integration into mainstream society is appropriate to give the reader an idea of the strength and frailty of the Order among the Italians in Ontario during its first thirty-five years of activity: 1915-1950.¹

In those years more than fifty percent of the Italian population in Canada resided in Ontario as the following statistic collected by Canadian Census reveals:

Years:	1921	1931	1941
Italian born:	35,531	42,578	40,432
Canadian Born:	31,238	55,595	72,193 ²
Total	66,769	98,171	112,625

[Italian in Ontario totalled 33,355 (49.9%) in 1921; 50,355 (51.2%) in 1931 and 60,085 (53.3%) in 1941]

Further, of the 60,085 Italian-Ontarians, only about 28,000 were born in Italy. The

*I thank my friends and colleagues Prof. Olga Zorzi Pugliese, Prof. Guido Pugliese, Teresa Manduca (OISE/University of Toronto), Annunziata Diponio (BA), and my daughter Concetta (a PhD student at York University) for their generous help.

¹ For a thorough discussion of the number of Italians, their distribution in Canada and the region of the Peninsula they came from, see Chapter One (pp.15-36 and notes) of my Doctorate dissertation, *The Concept of Italy in Canada and in Italian Canadian Writings from the Eve of Confederation to the Second World War*, University of Toronto, 1989.

² After the mid-1920s, Canadian-born Italians increasingly outnumbered their Italian parents.

Abstract

This article examines the struggle between fascists and anti-fascists in the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario, a struggle that began with the keynote speech delivered at the order's founding convention in 1924, and was followed by the election of a fascist as Grand Venerable ten years later, a legal confrontation between the Grand Consul of the Order and the Ontario Lodge of Toronto (that involved the entire membership and, eventually, the Supreme Court of Ontario) and anti-Semitic legislation in the homeland. Italy's loss in the Second World War finally brought the order's flirtation with fascism to an end in 1946.

Résumé: *Cet article examine le conflit entre fascistes et anti-fascistes dans l'Ordre des Fils de l'Italie d'Ontario, conflit déclenché par le discours principal au congrès fondateur de l'ordre en 1924, et resurgi dix ans plus tard lors de l'élection d'un fasciste comme "Grand Vénérable". Nous examinons dans ce contexte une bataille juridique entre le "Grand Consul" de l'ordre et la loge ontarienne de Toronto (conflit qui a concerné tous les membres et, à la fin, la cour suprême de l'Ontario) et l'adoption de législation anti-sémite en Italie. La défaite de l'Italie dans la seconde guerre mondiale a amené l'ordre en 1946 à abandonner son flirt avec le fascisme.*

rest, most of them children or teenagers, were born in Canada, while a few might have been born in the USA or South America. Further, 54.2 per cent of those Southern Italians who arrived before the Great War were illiterate and even most of those who were considered literate had only three years of primary schooling.³ Before the Great War most of them worked in the mining industry and railroad construction; with the slacking of these industries, Italians from 1915 on migrated from those frontier jobs to cities, becoming more than 80% urbanized by 1940.⁴

Further, out of thirteen Canadian cities with a population of more than 1,000 Italians in 1940, ten were in Ontario;⁵ however, the largest community, 25,351, was in Montreal, comprising almost the entire Italian population residing in Quebec. This explains why in Ontario the Order was, as we shall see, a province-wide organization while in Quebec it was concentrated in Montreal and its suburbs.⁶

By 1930, most of those Italians who arrived in Canada before the Great War,

³ On immigrants and literacy for the period 1899-1909, William G. Smith (*A Study in Canadian Immigration*, Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1920) reports the following statistics: percent of illiterate by nationality: Scandinavians 0.4; British 1.1; Irish 2.7; German 5.1; North Italians 11.8; Hungarians 11.4; Jews 25.7; Greeks 27.0; Rumanians 34.7; Polish 35.4; Croat and Yugoslavians 36.4; Southern Italians 54.2; and Portuguese 68.2. Even in money per capita Southern Italians were next to last with \$8.70; only the Portuguese were poorer with \$7.70.

⁴ *Italians in Canada*, a report prepared by the Research Division, Canadian Citizen Branch, Department of Secretary of State 1949, (NAC. Immigration Branch (RG 76. Vol. 131, File 28885, Part 11, p. 9) reads as follows: "The percentage of the Italian population living in rural areas had decreased from 38.72% to 19.06% while the percentage living in urban centres had increased from 61.28% to 80.94%." In 1941, 91,149 Italian were classified as urban dwellers and 21,476 as rural dwellers.

⁵ Italians in Ontario were distributed as follows: Toronto 17,887; Hamilton, 6,342; Windsor, 2,750; Fort William, 1,902; Niagara Falls, 1,857; Ottawa 1,790; Timmins, 1,551; Guelph, 1,315; Port Arthur, 1,132; and Welland, 1,025.

⁶ The other two cities with an Italian population exceeding 1,000 were Vancouver with 4,872 out of a

and they were the majority, had developed a network of social and business relations within the society at large and consequently were socially and economically an integral part of it. For example, in 1931, the Italian Information Bureau of Toronto published a *Direttorio italiano* (Italian directory) for Ontario in which 736 business and professional enterprises owned by Italians in the city of Toronto alone were listed.⁷

One finds various types of professional and business outlets in this directory. For example, there are five medical doctors, two optometrists, two lawyers, one dentist, a massage parlor, a taxi service, electricians, florists, musicians, artists, and so on. The bulk of Italian businesses were, however, in four main categories: namely, contractors (50), shoemakers (50), barbershops and shoeshine men (49), and an enormous number of fruit and grocery stores (412 or over 56 per cent of all Italian-owned business outlets).⁸

The first Italian fruit vendors who

sold their goods from carts on the streets of Toronto at the turn of the twentieth century had become storeowners by the twenties and thirties. The poet W.A. Sherwood left us a romanticized view of those first hard working Italian fruit sellers.⁹ One of these fruit venders was Mary Giordano's father, Pasquale Meschino. She describes how her father initiated his banana business: "My father purchased a pushcart and slowly, with what he had learned from Mr. Christopher he started his own banana business."¹⁰ She goes on describing how the entire family helped the green bananas to ripen with a small gas stove and how her father went around his route selling them:

So at about 7 o'clock every morning, the bananas were loaded onto the cart and Pa would sell them for about 25 cents a dozen to the housewives on his route [...] Summer, winter, rain or snow, my father would push his cart until the load was sold. Sometimes he would arrive home at 10 o'clock in the evening.¹¹

The *Star Weekly* recognized that these hard working Italians with their

provincial Italian population of 13,292; and 1,882 of Manitoba's 2,482 Italians resided in Winnipeg.

⁷ See *Direttorio Italiano*, Ontario (Canada) 1931, prepared and published by Italian Information Bureau, 111 Elm Street, Toronto, ON.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ W. A. Sherwood, two verses of "The fruit vendor", *The Canadian Magazine* (Vol. VI, November 1895), 17. "*The Fruit Vendor*":

Thus night after night as I stroll down the street
at his cart on the corner the same man I meet
at the South-western corner of Ad'laide and Young,
where the Saxon falls sweet from the soft Latin tongue.

Do you know that lone voice in the dark solitude
Seems like a sweet songster astray from the wood,
And I pause, lest I startle it, out in the night,
That sweet voice Italian, with cruel affright...

¹⁰ Mary Giordano, *The Banana Bunch* (n. d., n. p.), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

“amiable persistence in placing [their] wares before the people had led to a large increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables.”¹²

In the twenties and thirties, these fruit vendors had become owners of fancy stores. In almost every main street corner of metro Toronto, there was an Italian store displaying fruit and vegetables. Italian owned fruit and vegetable stores could be found everywhere—on Kingston Road in the East, in Mimico in the West, downtown on Front Street as well as on North Yonge Street. Several Italian families owned ten or more outlets.¹³ If we consider as five the average number of people involved in each of these 736 entrepreneurial families we arrive at approximately 3,500 to 4,000 people (adults and children), or about 25 to 30 per cent of the Italian population of Toronto. These people had their lives and their interests bonded to the city and its population at large.

Furthermore, Italian workers, men and women, had joined unions and this also made them feel part of the Canadian social fabric. In 1924, about 100 Italian tailors and helpers led by Luigi Palermo, H. Deluca, V. Celano, and G. Pastore

created in Toronto their own Local 235 of the International Garment Workers of America.¹⁴ The union affiliation made these men and their families feel they were an integral part of the Canadian society, as did all other Italian workers who had joined different unions in the various cities of the province. The emerging middle class (professional people, artisans, clerks, merchants), and those with union affiliation anchored Italians with the Ontario population, giving them a strong sense of belonging to and being part of the society round them.

More importantly, most Italians—over 98 per cent—spoke at least one of the two official languages of the land, English or French. In 1941, of the 112,625 Italian Canadians, 82,835 could speak both Italian and English; 6,564 were able to speak Italian and French and 21,230 could speak all three. Only a mere 2,196 people could speak neither of Canada’s two official languages.¹⁵ And finally, the most concrete sign of their advanced stage of integration was the high number of Italians who became naturalized British subjects—35,663 of the 40,432, or 88 per cent by 1940.¹⁶ This, in synthesis, is the context in which the Order Sons of

¹² E.M.S., “Canada Can Learn Much from Strangers within Our Gates”, *Newspapers Clipping Collection* (scrapbook) Toronto Public Library; *Star Weekly*, 17 April 1915.

¹³ For example, the Badali and the Battaglia families had twelve stores each; the Amodeo had eleven: three on Queen Street, two each on Young, Bloor and Dundas Streets, and one each on Roncesvalle and Avenue Road. The Cosentino family owned seven stores; the Comella six; several other Italian families had five or four fruit outlets each.

¹⁴ For a more detailed account, see Angelo Principe, “Note sul radicalismo tra gli italiani in Canada dalla Prima Guerra Mondiale alla Conciliazione,” *Rivista di studi italiani*. Anno VIII, N. 1-2 (giugno-dicembre 1990), 113-130.

¹⁵ See, *Italians in Canada*, prepared by the Research Division, Canadian Citizenship Branch, Department of Secretary of State, 1949, cit., 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 24; the reader should note that this study lists 200 Italians more than 1941 Canadian Census:

Italy of Ontario was created and grew.

I

In 1905, Dr. Vincenzo Cellaro initiated the Order Sons of Italy in America (OSIA) as a continent-wide organization. Cellaro's objectives were to organize the Italian immigrants of the United States and Canada into a single, great organization in order to protect and defend them from "unjust discrimination" which, in those years, was rampant.¹⁷ In its first ten years, the OSIA had neither a clear project to follow nor a plan to implement, except that of uniting all the Italians. It succeeded, however, in attracting under its medical insurance program hundreds of small mutual assistance societies that, in those early years, existed in every Italian community in North America. Baldo Aquilano, the first historian of the Order, pointed out that at its origin the OSIA was a gathering of Mutual Benefit Societies.¹⁸ Furthermore, to

convince workers to join the incipient organization, the Order opposed the use of scabs and often gave financial assistance to striking Italian workers. As Gaetano Salvemini pointed out, "The Sons of Italy were born with the promise of fighting the *padroni* and the *prominenti*."¹⁹

However, because the banner of the Order was *l'italianità* (being Italian) it attracted people of opposing ideologies, from the left and the right of the political spectrum: republicans and ardent monarchists, anarchists and nationalists, progressive people and reactionaries as well as military men and pacifists. Catholic priests and Protestant ministers even brought their conflicting religious dimension into the Order in addition to personality conflicts and the muddling of profiteers.²⁰

Then, in the twenties, as a consequence of fascist propaganda, an upsurge of nationalism irremediably broke the uneasy truce within the Order. On

112,825 against census figure of 112,625: the error is in the text.

¹⁷ See "History and Current Concepts of the Order", in a pamphlet published by the Patronato Lodge of Toronto published on the occasion of the Columbus Day Dinner-Dance, 17 October 1970. The Venerable, R. Tamburro, B.A., M.D., wrote: "Originally, the prime purpose was to bring our ancestors, in the new land, together on a fraternal basis and also to provide them with some form of mutual benefit insurance. As time evolved the Order became more and more concerned with problems of civic and community involvement. With this increase in concern there emanated an increase in participation as more Italians made their presence felt and respected in the various political and social spheres." For an official overview of the Ontario Order Sons of Italy see Gabriele P. Scardellato, *Within Our Temple, A History of the order Sons of Italy of Ontario*, Toronto, Order Sons of Italy of Canada, 1995.

¹⁸ Ernesto Valentini, "Lo Sfacelo Morale dell'Ordine Figli d'Italia." In *Zarathustra* (monthly, New York, April 1926), now in Roberto Ferrari, *Days Pleasant and Unpleasant in the Order Sons of Italy in America with a New Forward by Francesco Cordasco* (Clinton: Augustus M. Delley Publishers, 1974), 29.

¹⁹ See Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*, Edited with an introduction by Philip V. Cannistraro. (New York: Center For Migration Studies, 1977), 8.

²⁰ Baldo Aquilano (*L'Ordine figli d'Italia in America*, New York, N. Y, Società tipografica italiana, 1925, 31) writes: "Equally discouraging were the struggles within the Order, for which it was several times dragged into Court, giving a spectacle of continuous schisms which diminished it before the Italians."



this issue, the Montreal's weekly *L'Italia* wrote:

A rancorous spirit, inspired by two different and opposing political lines, is dominating the Order [...]. There are those who would like to see the Order become an instrument of fascist propaganda. There are others who would give their lives a thousand times to prevent even the cry, 'hurrah Mussolini'. Others [the majority], who do not have a definite idea of their own, are attracted and repulsed by the one and the other current, the right and left, in a confusion of odd ideas and pathetic propositions.²¹

Tension within the Order began to

Father Martinez organized first a social club in 1914, and named it after the great Italian composer and patriot Giuseppe Verdi.

take a specific ideological orientation as early as 1915. At a convention in Philadelphia that year, a patriotic spin inspired by the First World War drove the Order politically to the right. This infuriated the numerous left wing members. They were opposed to such a sharp turn towards nationalism, which, in their view, led the Order away from its original mandate of helping Italian workers living in North America. The left was itself divided into two main camps: those who wanted to fight from within the Order for the triumph of "socialism"²² and the radicals and anarchists who called upon members to quit the Association which, in their estimation, was now bent on serving the most reactionary interests in Italy and in North America.²³ In fact, with the advent of fascism in Italy, the Order became, in Salvemini's words, "a transmission belt of the Fascist Central Council" in Rome.²⁴ The polemic among left-oriented Italians, from social democrats to anarchists, did not stop there but continued in the Order and in the community at large throughout the United States and Canada.

In Ontario the first lodge was organized in Sault Ste. Marie by a group of young Italian immigrants under the guidance of the Rev. Joachim P. Martinez of

²¹ See *L'Italia* (weekly published in Montreal), 7 June 1924.

²² See *Il Martello* (anarchist weekly of New York), 24 December 1921.

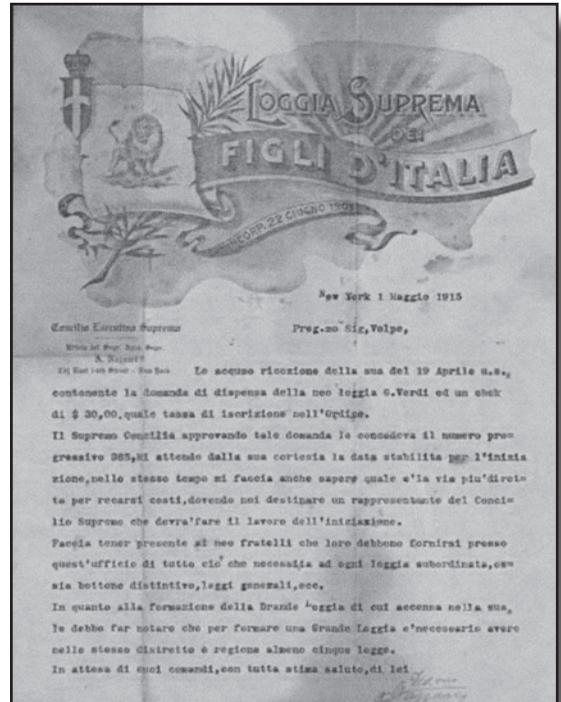
²³ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1922.

²⁴ See Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*, cit. p. 93.

Letter dated 1915 from the Supreme Lodge, Order Sons of Italy in America, authorizing the establishment of lodge #365 in Sault Ste. Marie.

the Catholic Holy Rosary Parish. Father Martinez organized first a social club in 1914, and named it after the great Italian composer and patriot Giuseppe Verdi. Martinez's immediate objective was to create an alternative to a very active anarchist group which, led by Umberto Martignago,²⁵ had a strong anticlerical and anti-nationalist bent.²⁶ In January of the following year, guided by him, about thirty members of the Giuseppe Verdi Club asked to be affiliated with the OSIA. They soon received a charter as the following letter, dated 1 May 1915, from the Office of the Supreme Archivist, A. Nazzari, in New York, documents:

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of 19 April last, containing the application form of the new lodge Giuseppe Verdi and a \$30.00 check as fee for joining the Order. The supreme Council approving your application has assigned the lodge the progressive N. 365. I expect from you to establish the date for the initiation and at the same time to let us know how to get there, since we have to designate a member of the Grand Council to perform the initiation rite. Inform the new brothers that they should get from this office everything that a subordinate lodge needs: namely badges, copies of the general laws, etc.²⁷



On 6 May, a charter issued in the name of the officers of the new Lodge (William Grassi, the Rev. P. Martinez and Giovanni Gentile) was received and the first Ontario lodge of the OSIA was formed.

In 1917 three new lodges were initiated: the Principe Umberto Lodge of St. Catherines, the D'Annunzio Lodge of Thorold, and the Marconi Lodge of Niagara Falls. Later, in 1920, the Trieste Lodge was inaugurated in Hamilton.²⁸ The names of these lodges leave no doubt

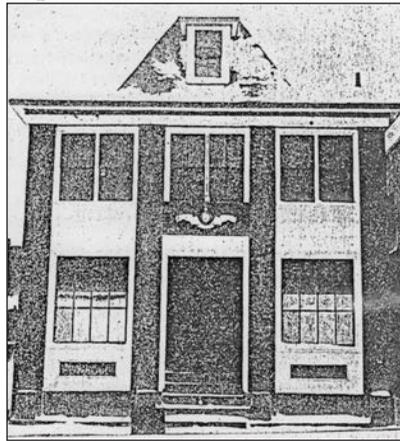
²⁵ Interview with Libera Martignago Bartolotti, in the author's possession.

²⁶ Interview with Attilio Bartolotti (a very active anarchist in Toronto and Windsor, ON), in the author's possession.

²⁷ See the booklet commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Giuseppe Verdi Lodge, Sault Ste Marie, ON, May 1990.

²⁸ "There is little information on the lodge until its first Venerable (president), Rosario Ingrassia, a Sicilian immigrant from Mussomeli and a long time resident of Hamilton, officially took office in January, 1922. From its inception, the Hamilton Sons of Italy—comprising the Trieste and two later lodges, The

as to the patriotic-monarchist sentiments that inspired the leading men involved. These sentiments were nourished during the course of the Great War by a continuous stream of Italian nationalist propaganda such as four Italian Tag Days,²⁹ the selling of Italian war bonds, the collection of money for the Italian Red Cross and for the Italian war orphans.³⁰ The Italian Catholic parish churches celebrated masses for the Italian soldiers who had died at the front, etc.³¹ Further Italian nationalistic propaganda was approved and encouraged by Canadian authorities for it was considered to be part of the Canadian war effort: Italian and Canadian patriotism was seen as one and the same. In fact, for the fourth Italian Tag Day, in August 1918, the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Laird Borden, sent the organizing committee a telegram of encouragement.³²



Lodge Giuseppe Verdi #365 in Sault Ste. Marie.

The success of the Italian troops at the front was received with joy and celebrated with public meetings, dances and parades. For example, to celebrate the “liberation” of the city of Gorizia in 1916, the Italians of Sault Ste. Marie, led by the Giuseppe Verdi Lodge and the Marconi Club, held a great demonstration. *Il Carroccio*, a New York City nationalist monthly, wrote:

Reverend G. Martinez and the [Royal] Consular Agent, Mr. Danovaro, organized a grand patriotic demonstration. The main speaker was the Consular Agent, who spoke as an individual and as an Officer of the Guglielmo Marconi Society and of the Giuseppe Verdi Lodge, OFd'I. Funds had been collected at the cry of Hurrah Gorizia!³³

Just after the war, the North American press reaction against D'Annunzio's hot headed occupation of the Dalmatian city of Fiume and, even more so, the irrational and extreme

Roma and Imperia, Daughter of Italy—became an important parte of the *colonia*,” see Enrico, Carlson Cumbo, Ph.D, *The Italian Presence in Hamilton: A social History: 1870-2000* (n. p.), 29-30.

²⁹ On the Tag Day, scores of young people, male and female, carrying the Italian Flag, collected money for the Italian soldiers. The City of Toronto contributed with a large sum as did the Provincial Government of Ontario. See the *Globe*, 23 August 1918; the *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 August 1918; the *Toronto World*, 21 and 23 August 1918.

³⁰ See Angelo Principe, *The Concept of Italy in Canada*, cit., 189-02.

³¹ See *La Tribuna Canadiana* (a weekly published in Toronto), 31 August 1918.

³² The following is the text of the telegram sent by the Prime Minister of Canada: “My sincere sympathy is with you in your effort to assist the gallant soldiers of our Italian ally. The soldiers of Italy have proven their courage and worth in the desperate struggle for the maintenance of liberty and civilization,” *The Globe*, 21 August 1918.

³³ See *Il Carroccio*, (a monthly nationalist publication of New York), Year II, N. 8, 1916, 190.

criticism of Italy by Toronto's weekly, *Saturday Night* for refusing to accept President Wilson's peace plan in Paris, spurred Italian Canadians to patriotic activities.³⁴

Furthermore, in the mind of the Italian Canadians, there was no conflict between Italian patriotism and loyalty to Canada. In fact this dual loyalty was encouraged by the Canadian lay and religious establishment and politicians of all three levels of government up to the Ethiopian war (1935-36) and even beyond by the Catholic clergy. This seeming ambivalence was thoroughly exploited by the Italian career consuls in order to spread fascism in the community. Even so, the type of fascism to which most Italian-Canadians ascribed was, they imagined, the sort that would fulfill their desire to see their native land respected and admired. They knew little of the regime ruling Italy. Most of them naively believed that one could be both a "good fascist and a good Canadian." As the consuls kept telling them: "Fascism and Italy are one and the same."³⁵

It was amidst the patriotic euphoria unleashed by the Allied victory in the

Great War that Dr. V. Greco of Niagara Falls, N.Y., came to Canada with the idea of creating in Ontario a Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy, as Italians were doing in Quebec. Hence, Dr. Greco, with the collaboration of Nicola Masi, Consular agent in Hamilton, Rosario Ingrassia, Aurelio del Piero, Calogero Figliola, Francesco Zaffiro³⁶ and some other prominent individuals, was able to overcome the many difficulties that he found in his way.

It is interesting to note, however, that Toronto, the city with the largest Italian population in Ontario, numbering about 15,000, had no lodge of the OSIA in the early 1920s; the Order was so irrelevant in Toronto that John Zucchi in his book, *Italians in Toronto... (1875-1935)*, mentions it *on pa san* only.³⁷ There were several secular and religious Italian associations in the city, three of which were very active and had a large membership—the Catholic Circolo Colombo, which was founded in 1916; the Società Italo-canadese, which was created in 1919 from the remains of three older ones and had 256 members in 1930;³⁸ and, the same year, the Trinacria Club, which gathered

³⁴ See *Saturday Night*, 3 May 1919.

³⁵ On this point see Robert Perin, "Making Good Fascists and Good Canadians: Consular Propaganda and the Italian Community in Montreal in the 1930s," in G. Gold ed., *Minority and Mother Country Imagery*, St. John's 1984, 136-58.

³⁶ Enrico, Carlson Cumbo, *The Italian Presence In Hamilton: ...* cited, 9.

³⁷ John Zucchi, *Italian in Toronto: Development of a National Identity 1875-1935* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 168, 173, 185.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 95, table 12. Since the pre-war associations had lost many members because some of them had left to fight the war in the Italian army and others, to evade conscription, left for the United States or elsewhere, the three oldest Italian associations of Toronto, Italian Workingmen's Circle (Società Operaia), Principe Umberto, and Vittorio Emanuele III, decided to join into one, and the Società Italo-Canadese was created on 6 April 1919. It was incorporated in the Office of "Registrar of Friendly Societies" in the province of Ontario on June 16 of the same year. See *Statuto della Società di Mutuo Soccorso Italo-Canadese*, Toronto, Italian Canadian Printing & Publishing Co., 35a Henderson Ave., Toronto, ON, n. d.

the large and industrious Sicilian community and had 165 associates.³⁹ It was at the last minute, just before the formation of the Grand Lodge of Ontario in 1924, that the “Lodge Ontario” was organized hurriedly in Toronto by the initiative mainly of Henry Corti, a Bolognese whose real name was Enrico Corticelli, with the help of Marco Missori, a local travel agent. Corti was the owner and editor of the local weekly *La Tribuna Canadiana* which, in the second half of the twenties, became *Tribuna Canadese*. An anomaly, the Toronto’s “Lodge Ontario” was, in those early years, the only one in the Province to bear a Canadian name.

The Order was, in fact, never strong in Toronto and it represented mostly the Italians living outside the city from across Ontario. For a brief period, 1937-1940, there were nominally six lodges in Toron-

to: two for women, Lodge Regina Elena and Lodge Vittoria Colonna and, beside the Lodge Ontario, three for men, Patronato Italiano, Giovinezza, and Littorio. (The two women’s lodges joined and became Lodge Fiorente in 1946).⁴⁰ The last four lodges had been founded in 1937-38, in the midst of the euphoria following the Ethiopian war. One of them, Lodge Patronato Italiano,⁴¹ was strictly apolitical; the other three, given their names, were clearly of fascist stamp: Giovinezza, Littorio and Vittoria Colonna.

The role women played in the OSIO has to be seen in the cultural and social context of Italian women in Canada between 1915 and 1950. Being new immigrants unable to speak the new language and most of them Catholics, first generation Italian women, and men as well, intentionally or by tradition, followed

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Italy’s entrance into the war in 1940 was like an earthquake for the Order, destroying eleven lodges. The ones written in bold, had either a direct or indirect fascist connotation. The lodges that ceased to exist were: **Giovinazza**, **Littorio** and **Vittoria Colonna** in Toronto, **Generale Umberto Nobile** in Windsor, **Principe Vittorio Emanuele** in Guelph, **Pontinia** in Brantford, Cristofaro Colombo in Peterborough, Italia in Guelph, **Elena di Savoia Regina Imperiale** in Windsor, **Stella d’Italia** in Timmins, and G. Garibaldi in Kirkland Lake. Other lodges merged or changed names: Maria Monte Carmelo of Humberstone merged with Lodge Dante Alighieri, in Toronto Lodge **Regina Elena** became Lodge Fiorente, Lodge **Maria Pia di Savoia** of Niagara Falls became Lodge Niagara, Lodge **Italo Balbo** in Welland became Lodge Dante Alighieri, Lodge **Impero Italico** in Galt became Lodge Aurora, Lodge **Gabriele D’Annunzio** in Thorold became Lodge Capri, and in Toronto the women’s Lodge Ontario changed its name to Lodge Fiorente. See the graphic projection.

⁴¹ The Patronato Lodge was organized as a social club in 1929 by a group of thirty new immigrants. The president was Galasso, a well know fashion designer of Toronto. He was convinced by the consul to affiliate the club to the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario. Hence in 1937, the Patronato Social Club became the Patronato Lodge of the OSIO. This lodge did not offer its members a sick benefit plan. Most of them were also members of other mutual benefit societies, which already offered this assistance. For example, the fashion designer Joseph Angellotti, a founding member of the Patronato Club, belonged also to the Fratellanza Italiana which had a medical assistance plan for its members. Of the Patronato Lodge only one person was interned when Italy entered the war in 1940: he was well known in the city and active in several other Italian associations some of which were promoting fascism. Information for this paragraph is taken from a taped interview with Mr. Angellotti in the author’s possession. Regarding Angellotti as a fashion designer, see “Joseph Angellotti Honoured by the Sons of Italy”, by Vilma Ricci, *La Voce del Congresso* (Toronto), January/February 1988, 6.

the Catholic Church's teaching: women were to stay home, look after their children and family. This model was reinforced by Mussolini's fascist government, which dominated Italy and, through its *consuls in loco*, patronized Italians abroad for much of this period.

Consequently, in Ontario's *italies*⁴² an ambiguous reality existed regarding women. In public, they played the role of good, submissive wives as the Church preached.⁴³ In the privacy of their homes, however, many Italian women ran their households, managed the family finances and often made business decisions with or without their husbands' consent. This essentially is how the Canadian-born Penny Petrone describes her mother's role in their home: "For years [she] had controlled the family's budget, her husband's paycheque, and the earning of her boys," yet she always "displayed, as required by customs and church law, deference and obedience to her husband."⁴⁴ Besides, Italian women, in general, busied themselves in keeping their often-poor homes spotless. A Toronto journalist, reporting on a case of domestic violence in the 'Ward', a slum area of Toronto, in 1921,

wrote: "The house, although only scantily furnished, was spotless clean with snow white linen in every room."⁴⁵

The first women's lodge, the Princess Mari Jose Lodge, was organized in Sault Ste. Marie in 1932 and Luisa Longarini became its Venerable. In 1934, as James Lyons, mayor of Sault Ste. Marie, stated, the organization of the women's lodge, "is a further evidence of your enthusiasm and social advancement, and I desire to compliment the Ladies on the progress that they have made, and the assistance that they have given to the Sons of Italy."⁴⁶ Though dominated by men, individually some women always had a position in the executive of the Grand Lodge.⁴⁷ Moreover, in the names listed in the application for a Patent incorporating the "Order of the Sons of Italy of Ontario, Mutual Benefit Society" in 1926, we find that among the seventy-eight people, at least eight were women. They were: Concetta Petti, Ernestina Masi, Marria [sic] Masi, Rachele Castaldi (widow), Linda Bini (dressmaker), Gemma Bratti and Lina Cressatti (both housewives), and Maria Della Giustina (secretary), all of the city of Hamilton.⁴⁸

⁴² Rather than using the phrase "little Italy", we opted for *italy* with the 'i' in the lower case.

⁴³ In fascist Italy, as in the Catholic Church, women had humanitarian roles and were kept out of political positions.

⁴⁴ Penny Petrone, *Breaking the Mold*, Toronto: Guernica, 1995, 58.

⁴⁵ Angelo Principe, "Glimpses of Lives in Canada's Shadow: Insiders, Outsiders, and Female Activism in the Fascist Era," in *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives*, edited by Donna Cabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 354.

⁴⁶ See the pamphlet, *Souvenir of the Grand Convention of the Sons of Italy of Ontario in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, July 1-2 1934*, 3.

⁴⁷ For example, Miss M. Della Giustina of Hamilton was "Treasurer" for the year 1925-26 and "Grand Financial Secretary" for the year 1926-27; and Clementina Sauro, wife of Liborio Sauro, was "Great Administrative Secretary" from 1934 to 1940.

⁴⁸ Department of the Secretary & Registrar, "Letters Patent as entered in Liber 213, as Number 127,

Following the example of the women of Sault Ste Marie, two women's lodges were founded in 1934: the Maria Pia of Savoia in Niagara Falls; and in Toronto, the wives and sisters of the male Lodge Ontario met in the St. Agnese Parish Church, on Grace and Dundas Streets, and organized the first female lodge in the city. They chose to name it Regina Elena Lodge, in homage to the Queen of Italy. "Our women [wrote *Il Bollettino italo-canadese*] could not have chosen a more beautiful name; it shall be a happy auspice to the Lodge's fortune and a memory of a bright example among our good women."⁴⁹

In Toronto the Order was never strong. The Lodge Regina Elena had a small number of associated members, about thirty of them; the men's lodge did not exceed seventy members. Considering that besides the numerous *Società Italo-Canadese* mentioned above, and the independent *Società Fratellanza Italiana* (founded in 1927), which alone had 250 members, we realize how inconsequential the Order was in Toronto. Further the two lodges of Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area, with an Italian population less than one tenth that of Toronto's, had over 350 members. We may say, then, that essentially the Order represented Italians living outside Toronto throughout Ontario.

The Grand Lodge of Ontario was inaugurated in Hamilton on 7 September 1924. After many attempts, its meetings and organizational work spread over several years, an indication of the difficulties the Order encountered throughout the province. The lodge's inauguration ceremony itself left a legacy of bitter polemic distrust between pro-fascists and anti-fascists; the key note speaker was Nanni, Leone Castelli, owner and editor of Montreal's first openly fascist weekly, *Le fiamme d'Italia*.⁵⁰ He argued that the Order should support fascism and the new Italian prime minister, Benito Mussolini, thus fanning the flames between fascists and antifascists.⁵¹

Two lodges, Principe Umberto and D'Annuzio, protested against Castelli's political interference in their own affairs. Alex Corsetti, Venerable of the Principe Umberto Lodge of St. Catherines, wrote a long letter to *Il Martello* in which he made clear the position of the two lodges and his personal, socialist views as well:

First of all, I have to say that it was not Castelli's business to criticize the order. [...] Would he want the Supreme Venerable to make the Order a "fascio" of cudgels. He is grossly mistaken: the Order is an apolitical and a-religious institution and should remain so. It is not necessary to [...] tell us [...] that fascism has done this and that and many other good things. We don't want to hear such things. We want equality and above all

in the Department of the Secretary and Registrar of the Province of Ontario: Given under my Hand and Seal of Office of the City Toronto in the said Province of Ontario this fourth day of September in the year of Our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and twenty-six."

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 28 September 1934,

⁵⁰ Regarding Nanni Leone Castelli and his weekly *Fiamme d'Italia*, see Angelo Principe, *The Darkest Side of the Fascist Year...*, cit., 42-46, 64, 65, & 229.

⁵¹ See Gaetano Salvemini, cit., particularly pages 11-14.

freedom of thought. We want to hear words that open the way to a better life, to brotherly love, and to honesty....⁵²

This controversy was a peripheral skirmish reflecting the fierce confrontation taking place in the OSI across the continent—confrontation that led to a schism in the New York Grand Lodge in 1925 and in the Grand Lodge of Quebec in 1926.⁵³

When, on 7 November 1926, delegates to the Second Grand Convention⁵⁴ of the OSIO assembled at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto, the struggle between fascists and their opponents, which, as we have just seen, began in Hamilton two years before, was not yet over. It had squarely struck at the heart of the Principe Umberto Lodge and practically destroyed it without resolving the conflict, since the confrontation with the “enemy of the order” (so the pro fascist faction called anyone who opposed their takeover the Brotherhood) was still going on. Giuseppe Mercurio, the new Venerable of the Principe Umberto Lodge of St. Catharines, was not triumphant in his address to the convention. As reported by the fascist *Bollettino Italo-Canadese* of

Toronto, Mercurio said,

His Lodge has conducted a fierce battle against the enemies of the Order; as a result, the membership has decreased and there are now only 25 members in good standing with payments, two of which are war veterans. The new officers, however, hope to raise the moral and increase the membership shortly. At the same time that the Lodge increases in number with people who are animated by high sentiments, the Officers continue the struggle against the adversaries who want to break the Order.⁵⁵

Besides this contention, the 33 delegates, representing seven lodges, celebrated Italian patriotism with speeches and a parade to the war memorial, the destination of every official Italian parade that took place in Toronto during the years that fascism dominated in Italy.

Preceded by Maestro G. Morra’s band, the parade marched from Queen’s Park to the old City Hall. There Dr. H. Smith, ex-honorary Italian vice-consul, delivered a speech in which “he praised the Italian contribution to the World War.” From there, the parade made its way to the “Old Fellows Temple,” 229 College Street, where with other speeches they commemorated the Armistice Day. Several

⁵² See the article titled “Canada” in *Il Martello*, New York, 4 October 1924, 4.

⁵³ At the 1926 Convention, the Quebec Grand Lodge split. According to the antifascists, the pro-fascist faction had betrayed the Order’s basic principles of political freedom, and consequently they left the brotherhood. “It was then [wrote Anselmo Bartolotto of Ottawa] that the split of the order was determined [...] on 4 April 1927, they left the North American Order Sons of Italy and founded the independent *Ordine Figli d’Italia*,” see Anselmo Bartolotto, *Storia dell’Ordine Italo-Canadese*, unpublished manuscript, Ottawa, 1964, 304. For a detailed account of the split in the Order and the events leading to it, see Angelo Principe, “The Difficult Years of the Order of the Sons of Italy (1920-1926),” *Italian Canadiana*, Vo. 5, 1989, 104-116.

⁵⁴ Essentially this was the first real convention, since it was there that the OSIO received two Ontario provincial charters, as a Society and also as a Benefit Society. Before this convention, the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario did not legally exist.

⁵⁵ See the *Bollettino Ufficiale, Ordine Figli d’Italia in America*, January 1927, 9.

of Toronto's Italian Associations that had nothing to do with the OSIO took part in the commemoration parade. They were the Trinacria (Sicilian) Society, the Fratellanza Italiana (Italian Brotherhood), the St. Agnese Club, and the female Duchessa D'Aosta Society, all carrying their banners and wreaths of flowers.⁵⁶

The Supreme Venerable of the Order, Giovanni Di Silvestro, who had come from New York to preside over this important convention, beat his usual drum of discipline, unity and strength. In his speech, he said, "The Rome of today is as that of the Caesars, which stood for law and order. Mussolini was applying these principles to Italy."⁵⁷ He spoke of the Italians abroad, in particular those in the Order, as "*avanguardisti*" (vanguards) with a mission to defend "*la Patria nostra*" (our fatherland). The following is a taste of the rhetoric, in the style of the time, with which he addressed delegates and guests:

Our race has been and is great. Hence we cannot remain silent and inert while Italy's enemies [antifascists] conjure evil actions against Her. Therefore discipline is necessary. We know that union means strength and fascists exploited this secret to triumph and save Italy.⁵⁸

Fifty-five years later, at the Convention held in Sault Ste. Marie, in 1981, one of the

participants, conveniently forgetting that in 1926 he was a leading fascist, remembered with nostalgic innocence that event and its choreographic parade; the lapsed years had, in his mind, purged that event of the dominant fascist dimension.⁵⁹

Behind the rhetoric of unity and discipline at the 1926 Grand Convention there was a great deal of divisiveness over the administration and governance of the Grand Lodge. Nonetheless, the Order achieved a number of undeniable successes at that convention: its legal and administrative structure had been laid down then; the Grand Lodge was incorporated and had become a legal entity with a provincial, Ontario charter; and a Sickness Benefit United Fund (SBUF) was presented to the delegates for discussion and approval, and they voted to accept it.

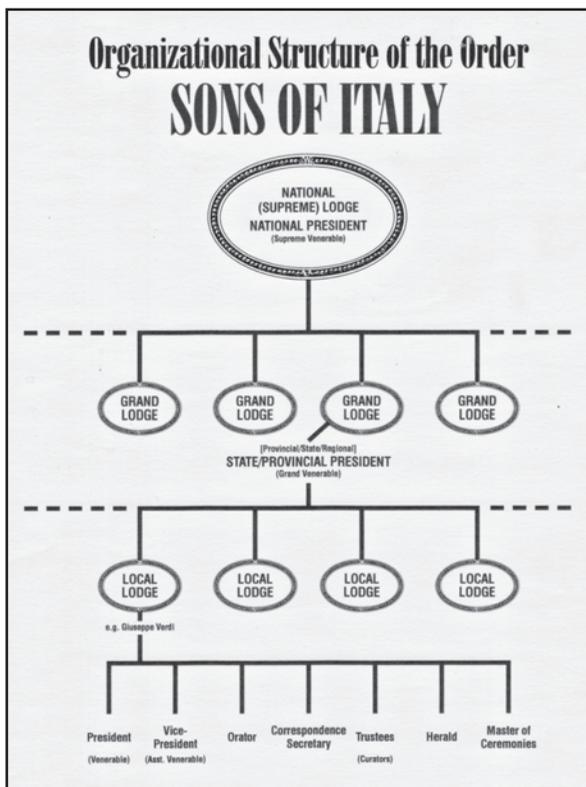
It was with respect to the United Mortuary Fund (UMF) that divergence was most pronounced. After much initial handwringing, delegates were sharply at odds; the delegates of Niagara Falls, Humberstone, St. Catherines and Thorold Lodges were in favour; those from Sault Ste. Marie, Hamilton and Toronto were against. Unable to find unity regarding the mortuary fund, the Assembly decided, "every Lodge of the Province of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, December 1926, 10.

⁵⁷ See "Formed Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy," *Mail and Empire*, Toronto, 9 November 1926.

⁵⁸ See *Bollettino Ufficiale* of the OSIA, January 1927, 10.

⁵⁹ "...there was a parade, organized by the Grand Lodge, and all Lodges participated with the Grand Lodge bearing their appropriate banners and flags. All others present at the parade marched to the First World War Memorial and laid a wreath of flowers in honor of the dead of the conflict. After the ceremonies had been completed, those present returned to their cities most impressed with having participated in one of the most beautiful and moving manifestations of Italian patriotism that had existed to that time", see "Reflection as Told by Brother Frank Zaffiro", in *Order Sons of Italy of Ontario, Proceeding of the 27th Grand Convention*, May 15-18, 1981, Sault St. Marie.



Ontario is autonomous.⁶⁰

At the closing of the convention, the delegates thanked the Grand Venerable Dr. P.F. Braid of the Trieste Lodge, for having prepared wisely the groundwork for the convention and for the SBUF. Because of this, he was promoted by personal decision of the Supreme Venerable Di Silvestro to the position of “Supreme Deputy” for Ontario. Nicola Masi, con-

sular agent in Hamilton, was taking over the position left vacant by Braid’s promotion. Dr. Pasquale Fontanella of the Ontario Lodge, a founder and member of the Fascio Principe Umberto of Toronto,⁶¹ was acclaimed president of the SBUF with the power to choose the secretary and the treasurer. Following the theme of the convention set by the Supreme Venerable, Fontanella iterated the need to be “united in one force of action.” Before adjourning for the evening dinner dance at the King Edward Hotel, the Grand Convention decided to send a telegram to the Premier Ferguson of Ontario and one to the head of the Italian fascist government, H.E. Benito Mussolini.⁶²

All delegates organized in honour of Supreme Venerable Di Silvestro an evening dinner dance, which was attended by several personalities among whom were the Mayor of Toronto, Mr. Foster, and the Hon. Minister of Health, Forbes Godfrey, who stood in for Premier Ferguson who was not able to attend because of the on-going provincial electoral campaign.⁶³ Returning to their home cities, the delegates were more than satisfied with

⁶⁰ See *Bollettino Ufficiale*, Order Sons of Italy in America, January 1927, 10.

⁶¹ See Angelo Principe, *The Darkest Side of the Fascist Year*. The Italian Canadian Press: 1920-1942, Toronto: Guernica, 1999, 189, 228, 231, 237, 239 & 246.

⁶² See *Bollettino Ufficiale*, Order Sons of Italy in America, January 1927, 9.

⁶³ “Formed Grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy,” *Mail and Empire*, 9 November 1926, 4. On the “Letters Patent”, the names of the Officers of the Order were: “Nicola Masi, Consul of Italy, and Aurelio Del Piero, Merchant, both of the city of Hamilton, [...] Michele Antici of the City of San Catherines [...], and Henry Corti, Publisher, and Marco Missori, accountant, both of the City of Toronto.”

LICENSE NO. 1011 TERM OF LICENSE
A.D. 1927 TO 1928

Department of Insurance
Ontario

LICENSE

(This is to Certify that)

ORDER OF SONS OF ITALY OF ONTARIO MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY

Being a MUTUAL BENEFIT SOCIETY
within the meaning of The Ontario Insurance
Act, 1924 has complied with the requirements
of the said Act, and
is hereby licensed and authorized for and
during the term beginning
on the SEVENTEENTH day of JANUARY A.D. 1927 and ending
on the THIRTIETH day of JUNE A.D. 1927
to undertake contracts of insurance
of the following classes
SICK AND FUNERAL BENEFITS

W. H. PRICE
MINISTER

ENTERED ON INSURANCE LICENSE
REGISTER BY
C. M. Peters
ENTRY CLERK

Shepherd Foster
SUPERINTENDENT OF INSURANCE

License from 1927 authorizing the Order Sons of Italy to insure for sickness and funeral benefits.

however, it took eight years before all the lodges of the province would accept the UMF, which paid “the sum of \$200 for every deceased member.” It was at the Grand Convention of 1934, once again presided over by the Supreme Venerable, Giovanni di Silvestro, that, “it was decided that the first condition to be part of the Order were to accept the Mortuary Fund.”⁶⁴ After that decision, even the male and female lodges of Sault Ste. Marie—the Giuseppe Verdi Lodge and the Princess Maria Jose Lodge—which had singularly held out, voted for the UMF. *Il Bollettino italo-canadese* expressed satisfaction by announcing, “Another beautiful affirmation of brotherhood solidarity ... All Lodges are now on board.”⁶⁵

The reason it took the lodges eight years to accept the UMF is not completely clear, though the Great Depression of the 1929-1933 probably played a major role. Further, according to Frank Zaffiro, concomitant with economic depression, “an epidemic influenza struck in 1929-1930 and the funds of the SBUF were quickly depleted. It then became necessary for the commission to tax its members in order to raise the required funds to pay for benefits.”⁶⁶ Because of the depression, the Italians who were predominantly labourers were largely unemployed and could

the outcome of this successful convention because the SBUF would ensure a solid unity among the various lodges dispersed throughout the vast territory of Ontario.

In spite of the convention’s success,

⁶⁴ See “L’Ordine Figli d’Italia nell’Ontario: Rinnovamento di Forze”, in *L’Ordine*, a biweekly 8-page tabloid bulletin (published in Montreal) by The “Order Sons of Italy in Canada” (Year 2, n. 12, 1 July 1946), 2.

⁶⁵ *Il Bollettino italo-canadese*, 5 October 1934.

⁶⁶ “Reflection as Told by Brother Frank Zaffiro”, cit., p. 2.

not afford to pay either the monthly dues or the premium USBF.

II

The financial crisis looming over the lodges of the province during those years can be easily deduced from the numerous appeals of the Ontario Lodge of Toronto.⁶⁷ This organization was in fact reduced to about thirty members in 1932.⁶⁸ To deal with the crisis, its new council decided to declare an amnesty. With a minimal expense, those who wanted to belong but could not afford to, could, “for a period of six months..., join this great family of the Order Sons of Italy... by paying \$1.00 only as an admission fee.”⁶⁹ Hard times had also come to the other lodges throughout the province. The situation was so serious that while the Order was going into its Fifth Grand Convention in Sault Ste. Marie, in 1934, “the Mutual Benefit Society, created with so much sacrifice, was on the verge of bankruptcy.”⁷⁰

However, while all the lodges were experiencing a membership decline and curtailed activities, the Sault lodges

alone were growing and very active. In 1932, these two lodges built through donations of \$150 to \$500 a social hall or temple: because of the economic depression, most of the donations were in the form of free labour.⁷¹ In September of that year the lodges moved from 582 Queen Street West, where they occupied a building that had been purchased in 1923 from a Finnish Temperance organization, to their new temple on the corner of Cathcart and Hudson Streets.

In 1934, the Mayor of Sault Ste Marie, James Lyons, in welcoming the delegates of the Fifth Grand Convention to his city, pointed out the vitality of the Italians at the Sault. He said: “The magnificent temple which you now occupy, which is one of the finest in the Province of Ontario, is evidence of the advancement that you have made, and your determination to command a leading position among the fraternal organizations of our city.”⁷² Even the newly elected Grand Venerable, Dr. V. Sabetta, from the column of the *Bollettino italo-canadese*, congratulated his brothers and sisters of Sault Ste. Marie for their “patriotic”

⁶⁷ The following is one of such appeals: “We warmly appeal to young Italians living in Toronto and in the entire Province to aggregate themselves with the large nucleus of the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario. [...] It is necessary to remember that when tragedy strikes, if one does not belong to a large organization, the needy could suddenly find him self in serious difficulties. For example, a group of friends had to look after the funeral of Francesco Albanese who drowned recently. If he had been associated with the Order he could not only have had a large funeral, but his father would also have received a sum of money, as dictated by the laws of the Order Sons of Italy”, See *Il Progresso italo-canadese* (Toronto weekly), 21 August 1930.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1932.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 March 1932.

⁷⁰ See “Reflection as told by Brother Frank Zaffiro”, cit., 2.

⁷¹ See the booklet, *G. Verdi Lodge N. 1, Grand Opening, June 24-27, 1964*, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, 23; also the pamphlet titled *75th Anniversary Giuseppe Verdi Lodge*, cit., 2.

⁷² See *Souvenir* of the Grand Convention of the Sons of Italy of Ontario in Sault Ste. Marie, 1-2 July 1934, 3.

achievement. At the celebration of the second anniversary of the Temple inauguration, he wrote:

Today is the second anniversary of the opening of the Temple of the order. On this day I [...] feel it is my duty, as a brother of the Verdi Lodge and as Grand Venerable of this Province, to send you all my affectionate salute and let you know that I constantly think of you. You and I remember the struggle we engaged to realize this magnificent temple which will witness your faith in our “*patriottismo*” and the spirit of cooperation which will always distinguish you.⁷³

Undoubtedly the building of a temple during the depression was quite an achievement of which both the Sault lodges and the Order could be proud. However, the Order went to the Grand Convention of 1934 under considerable duress.

That Convention elected a new Grand Council headed by, as mentioned, Dr. Vincent Sabetta of Sault Ste Marie. Assisted by more active members, Sabetta set out to reorganize and revitalize

the Order now that the economic crisis seemed to be fading out. The dynamism of the new executive was beneficial to the Order. The Grand Venerable Sabetta travelled throughout the province breathing new life into existing lodges

and creating new ones. Through his efforts and interest, the lodges began to resume their activities. The Trieste Lodge in Hamilton was a case in point. It created a three-man committee charged with bringing new adherents and reclaiming former members to the lodge: the men were Aurelio Del Piero, Francesco Zaffiro, and A. Scimè. In the Trieste Lodge “activities of resurgence are taking flight”, wrote *Il*



Bollettino italo-canadese.⁷⁴

The new Grand Venerable Sabetta sought to indoctrinate the brothers of the Order in the fascist ideals. With this in mind he sought help from the fascist “Minister of Press and Propaganda” in Rome. He wrote a long letter, telling the Minister his plan for the Order and asking him for some books on fascist doc-

⁷³ See *Il Bollettino italo-canadese*, 14 September 1934.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1934.

trine and propaganda.

Three years ago with the trust of the brothers [he wrote] I was called to lead the Order in this Province. As soon as I was elected, my main duty was to lead the order not only on the field of common assistance [...] but also to make the brothers aware of being Italians and have a secure understanding of the new ideals of fascist Italy.

In order to educate them in the fascist ideals, Sabetta asked the Minister for some books, “particularly books for divulging the fascist doctrine and for a better knowledge of today’s Italy.” The letter closed with words of praise for fascist Italy and its Duce: “the Italians keep in their hearts alive the divine flame of patriotic love. Today, they look with faith and renewed passion at the development of the new Italy and they immensely admire the Duce and Fascism.”⁷⁵

Vice Consul Tiberi reinforced this argument *in loco*. In a speech he delivered in a meeting of the Trieste Lodge in Hamilton, belittling antifascist members of the Order, he argued that the OSI was a fascist-dominated association: “Italians are all fascist, the little group of antifascists is not really Italian.” He stated that the Sons of Italy “may wave the tri-coloured flag” because the Order is always ready “to defend what Italy stands for.”⁷⁶ Echoing the Consul, Cav. Iacopo Magi,

secretary of the Toronto’s fascio, said: “Fascists are for the great part members and collaborators of the Sons of Italy, and the latter are fascists too. Therefore I am happy to be here at this magnificent gathering, not only as a brother of the Order, but in my office of Secretary of the Toronto Fascio.”⁷⁷

In evaluating Sabetta’s seven-year tenure (1934-1940), Frank Zaffiro, himself a protagonist of that period as Venerable of the Trieste Lodge, had nothing but praise and positive words for Sabetta. He said: “At the Grand Convention which was held in Windsor in 1940, it was reported that the membership of the Order was almost 3,000, the largest since the Order’s inception; and the funds of the Mutual Benefit Society had increased to about \$15,000.00.”⁷⁸ Zaffiro’s hyperbolic membership figure is corrected by G. Scardellato: such a “figure seems somewhat inflated, [...] in early 1939 (B.I.C. [Bollettino Italo Canadese], 2 February 1939) reported circa 1,900 adult members of the Order.”⁷⁹ The 1,900 figure is confirmed by the Order’s biweekly paper, *L’Unione*, which wrote, “The seventh Gran Convention was held in Windsor in the Order Sons of Italy home, on the 25 and 26 February 1940. Delegates of 22 lodges representing circa two thousand members were attending.”⁸⁰ Unde-

⁷⁵ Archivio Storico Ministero Affari Esteri, Rome: Direzione Generale Ministero per la Stampa e Propaganda, Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda, Prop 1, 11/14, Ordine Figli d’Italia in Ontario: Dr. V. Sabetta, letter dated March 4, 1937.

⁷⁶ See *Il Bollettino italo-canadese*, 29 May 1936.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “Reflection as Told by Brother Frank Zaffiro”, cit., 2.

⁷⁹ Gabriele P. Scardellato, *Within our Temple*, cit., 18.

⁸⁰ “L’Ordine Figli d’Italian nell’Ontario,” see *L’Unione*, cit., 2.

L'Unione, the Order's official newsletter.

done twenty years before, a wave of patriotic enthusiasm that made the local intelligentsia (professional people, Catholic and some Protestant clergies, university students and professors, etc.) very vulnerable to the nationalistic rhetoric and the attention of the consuls. Between 1935 and 1937, a good number of Italians who were either left leaning or belonged to the Liberal Party, as a consequence of the Ethiopian victory, joined the fascio and were active in its subordinate organizations like the OSI.

The Order, like the other patriotic societies, received a tremendous boost from the fascist victory in Ethiopia. A 1937 report by an RCMP secret agent reads as follows:

niably Sabetta worked hard for the Order. He went, at his own expense, from one corner of the province to the other to revitalize old Lodges and to organize new ones. In his efforts, the easing of the Depression helped him and, more importantly, by the Ethiopian fascist victory (1935-1936), which energized the Italian Canadians.

The Ethiopian war created among the Italian Canadians, as the Great War had

During the last two years, I have noted in this city a profound change in the way the Italians think. They seem to be oriented toward fascism... In studying the community I came to the conviction that it could not have been differently. The Italian population in general is of honest people, workers with little or no education at all. The few intellectual and prominent people who should guide the community have been approached by the fascist Consular authorities and were convinced to join the fascio.⁸¹

In fact, as soon as Mussolini pro-

⁸¹ RCMP Archives, report dated 29 September 1937, quoted by Luigi Bruti Liberati, *Il Canada, l'Italia e il fascismo: 1919-1945*, Rome: Bonacini Editore, 1984, 172.

claimed that Italy had finally regained her empire, fascists and their supporters assisted by the Italian Catholic priests,⁸² coordinated by the Italian consuls, burst into several successful activities throughout the country. Eight new OSIO lodges were founded in 1936-37, just after the fascist victory in Ethiopia. Four of these lodges were, as mentioned, in Toronto: Patronato, **Giovinezza**, **Littorio** and **Vittoria Colonna**; one, Lodge Cristoforo Colombo, was in Peterborough; the **Lodge Italo Balbo** was in Welland; the **Lodge Pontinia**, in Brantfort; and the **Lodge Principe Vittorio Emanuele** in Guelph: six of these lodges [the ones in bold] bear fascist or fascist-related names. This extraordinary surge of interest in the Order tells clearly how strong the effect of the Ethiopian victory was on the Italians in Ontario and in Canada in general. Singularly, however, the two Italian associations of Thunder Bay resisted the insidious advances of Emilio Marino, Fascist Consular Agent *in loco*, to become lodges of the OSIO. He “failed in his attempt to make the two Italian societies in Thunder Bay, the Principe di Piemonte Society of

Fort William and the Italian Benefit Society of Port Arthur, responsive to fascist ideology.”⁸³

Overconfident with their African success, fascists, both inside and outside of the Order, grew bolder; this, unfortunately, caused the thin line separating the Order from the *fascio* to disappear, prompting some people to quit the Order that was now openly fascist. Donaldo Di Giulio, who had joined the Ontario Lodge in 1928, left in 1935 after an unpleasant incident involving him and his father-in-law, Leone Zaccaria, a well-known socialist in the community. It was during the Spring Ball of the Ontario Lodge that fascists, according to Di Giulio, “threw the *Ordine Figli d’Italia* into disarray” (*scompiglio*).⁸⁴

While fascists in the community became emboldened, in the society at large the Ethiopian war was a turning point for fascism. In fact an episode that occurred in Sault Ste. Marie in the fall of 1938 is a case in point. There, the Venerable of the Verdi Lodge, G. Colizza, was forced to resign because of his fascist affiliation. At the Armistice Day celebration, he placed

⁸² See Charles M Bayley, *The Social Structure of the Italians and Ukrainian Immigrants Communities: Montreal 1935-37*. Master Thesis, McGill University, 1939, 161.

⁸³ John Potessio, *The Italians of Thunder Bay*, Thunder Bay, Ontario: Chair of Italian Studies, 2005, 93-4; also his “Ethnicity, Identity and Loyalty of Lakehead Italians during World War II”, unpublished paper delivered at a seminar held in Thunder Bay on 1-3 October 2010.

⁸⁴ Taped interview with Donaldo Di Giulio (a Toronto businessman) in the author’s possession. The following is a translation from Italian of the episode as narrated by Di Giulio: “Every Easter Sunday, the OSIO organized a ball. Generally the Committee had a room where people could have a refreshing drink: a glass of wine, a beer or some soft drink... we, my father-in-law and myself, had been invited to go there. We knocked and, as the door opened, they began singing the fascist hymn “Giovinezza”. I did not like it and my father-in-law, Leone Zaccaria, a socialist, was stunned to see there, among fascists, Antonio Gatto, a pre-war socialist. We later learned that Tommaso Mari, the editor of the local fascist paper, *il Bollettino italo-canadese*, was to marry Gatto’s daughter, Giuseppina, therefore he [Gatto] could no longer be a socialist.”

a wreath at the war memorial and, against the lodge council's instruction, defiantly raised his right arm in a fascist salute. This created a wave of protests that reverberated throughout the country.

The members of the Canadian Legion of that city had been vigilant against Italian fascists since 1935 when in a local movie hall a documentary was shown. During the screening, local Italian fascists "booed and hissed the newsreel showing pictures of the British fleet" and cheered when "Italian troops" appeared on the screen. Since then, "squads of members of the Canadian Legions have attended to guard against any recurrence of [such] demonstrations."⁸⁵ For Colizza's act of bravado, therefore, the council and the membership of the Verdi Lodge demanded and obtained Colizza's resignation.⁸⁶

The following is how Carlo Fera, a protagonist of that incident, remem-

bered it:

On the 10th of November 1938, we [the OSIO] had a very large meeting in which Colizza was told to place a writ at the Cenotaph the next day and, as we did every year, in placing the wreath to make the Sons of Italy salute. Instead he was advised by some of his friends that he should salute fascistically. The day after [the ceremony], I received a call from the Algoma Steel [where Fera worked] telling me what had happened; and that if "I wanted to keep the door open ... we should do something about Colizza". I immediately contacted Luigi Pasquantonio. We called a meeting of the officers of the Lodge including Colizza. There we decided to ask Colizza to resign. If he would not withdraw we should remove him. At the meetings Colizza saw that the odds were against him and he decided to withdraw.⁸⁷

Taking Colizza's position, Fera became Venerable of the Verdi Lodge from 1938-1939.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the year before (1937), in Windsor, Luigi Mecone, a leading member of the General Nobile

⁸⁵ See the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, 8 November 1938. According to the RCMP, that episode was the consequence of Libero Sauro's fascist propaganda in Sault Ste. Marie. See note 116 below.

⁸⁶ See "G. Colizza, Venerabile della G. Verdi, OFd'I costretto a dimettersi", *La Voce italo-canadese*, 19 November 1938, title page.

⁸⁷ Interview with Carlo Fera, in author's possession. The following is part of that interview related to OSI:

Q.: How many members were at the meeting?

A.: I am not sure... I think we had a membership of about 150 and I think we had better than a half and in order to win a vote we had to have at least 75% of the membership.

Q.: Who did call you?

A.: The man who called me was a good friend of mine working for the utility Service Department, David Hoper.

Q.: How did he know that they were going to close the door of the OSI?

A.: How he got the information I don't know. But he was a member of the Masonic Order and, while he was not member of the Canadian Legion, he was a regular at the Canadian Legion bar ...

Q. Are or were you a member of the Canadian Legion?

A. I was a member of the Canadian Legion Dominion Day Committee, representing the Order Sons of Italy.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Lodge (OSIO), resigned as well for related reasons. He was accused of being responsible for the fascist indoctrination of Canadian children who attended Italian classes at the Lodge.⁸⁹

Unfortunately these and similar episodes linked the Order to the *fascio* since both organizations “fostered” nationalism and “shared the same key members that heightened the impression that the Order was a fascist organization.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, the Grand Council’s dictatorial method of ruling the Order infuriated a large number of “brothers” throughout the province and prompted a spectacular court case against the Grand Council. Leading the fight was the Toronto based Ontario Lodge.

III

The dispute between the Ontario Lodge of Toronto and the Grand Council of the OSIO was about a special \$0.50 tax imposed on all members by the Executive Committee. This tax was to be paid whenever a member died. In return the Order would pay the beneficiary \$400 rather than the usual \$200. The problem was that Ontario laws regulating mutual benefit societies like the

Order Sons of Italy of Ontario Mutual Benefit Society did not allow more than \$250 insurance. The \$0.50 tax was paid to a special “*Fondo Benevolenza*” created by the OSIO. As stated, there were two organizations: The Order ... Mutual Benefit Society, which had the license to insure its members; and the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario, which was not licensed. The Ontario Lodge asked the Grand Council why members should pay a tax to a society that had no mandate to insure members.

Instead of an explanation, the secretary of the Lodge received the following laconic letter, dated, March 21, 1938:

I inform you that the Executive Committee of the Grand Council decided unanimously to suspend the Officers constituting the administration of the Ontario Lodge, effective until the new order. The measure in question is legally binding, starting from the present date.⁹¹

A week later, again without explanations, the Grand Council proceeded to dissolve the Ontario Lodge. A letter communicating this decision and an application form for the Order was sent to all members of the Ontario Lodge. The application was to be signed and returned

⁸⁹ See *Il Lavoratore*, a communist led Italian bi-weekly of Toronto, 28 May 1937. For a detailed account of this episode see Angelo Principe, “The Italian-Canadian antifascist press in Toronto: 1922-1940,” in *NEMLA Italian Studies*, vol. four, 1980, 119-37.

⁹⁰ See Samuel Sidlofsky, *Post-War Immigrants in the Changing Metropolis with Special Reference to Toronto’s Italian Population*, unpublished Doctorate Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1969, 67n.

⁹¹ *Il Lavoratore* (Toronto), 30 April 1938, gave much space to this event and introduced it with the following statement: “Generally we are not interested in the internal affairs of any society. But since lately a manifesto has been circulating that seriously compromises the integrity of the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario. It is not our responsibility to take a stand regarding the accusation of the Ontario Lodge against the Supreme Counsel of the Order. We believe however that the matter is of public interest. Therefore we reprint the manifest as it appeared.” Quotations when not otherwise indicated come from this leaflet reproduced in *Il Lavoratore*.

to the Grand Recording Secretary. Upon receiving it, the Grand Council would assign the members to a new lodge.

The following is the letter. It bears the headings of both associations, Order Sons of Italy in Ontario and the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario Mutual Benefit Society and was dated Toronto, 28 March 1938:

Dear Brother:

The Grand Council of the order Sons of Italy and of the Order Sons of Italy Mutual Benefit Society has decided in its last extraordinary meeting to dissolve the Lodge Ontario because of the rebellion against the Grand Council's authority which reveals that the Lodge does not understand the brotherhood principle, dissociating from the Order with its actions.

The Brothers of the ex Ontario Lodge are guaranteed all their rights as required by Law until the second week of April p. v.; after which they are no longer part of the Order, unless they sign the enclosed application form and are in good standing with payments. In this case they lose no rights, as it is for the Brothers who move from one Lodge to another.

You Sir are cordially invited to fill the application form, sign it and send it as soon as possible to this Grand Administrative secretary. As soon as the Grand Council grants the "Nulla Osta", you will be invited to attend the meeting of the new Lodge where you may regularly pay your dues.

The Grand Administrative
Secretary, L. Sauro.⁹²

Further, following these draconic

decisions, the Grand Council moved to confiscate the Lodge's fund. A leaflet from the executive of the Ontario Lodge reads:

Not yet satisfied with having dissolved the Lodge and imposed on the Brotherhood to be loyal to an order which is not our Order; now our Grand Council treats us like brigands and believing who knows what about us, they confiscate the fund of our Lodge, endangering our brothers' hard sweat savings. That is uncivilized and shameful. Nothing can be more shameful than taking the Order to Court.⁹³

To get rid of the executive of the Lodge Ontario, the Grand Council attempted to create a new lodge, the fascist "Loggia Impero Italico" (Italian Empire Lodge). A meeting of the newly founded lodge was called but few people showed up; most of the members supported the action of their lodge's executive and stayed home.

On 12 April, the executive of the Ontario Lodge called a special meeting, in which they explained to the assembly what had transpired. They charged the Grand Council with illegal actions and of attempting to circumvent provincial laws:

They deceive us when they tell us that they guarantee \$400.00 for mortuary insurance because we, as a Mutual Assistance Society, cannot pay more than \$250.00 as a mortuary fund. Any other expedient to circumvent the Law of the Province is a crime as the Provincial Authority of the Insurance Department explained to us.⁹⁴

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

In addition, the officers of the Ontario Lodge protested loudly against the dictatorial methods and the intimidations used by the Grand Officers in dealing with members who had availed themselves of their democratic right to ask legitimate questions. In fact, they exhibited a letter from the Grand Recording Secretary to Mrs. C. Chiavarini, member of the female Regina Elena Lodge. In this letter, she was told that she was no longer a member of the Order because she asked the “sisters”—members of the lodge—to vote against the 50-cent tax. The following is the letter in question:

Dear Madam;
I inform you that the Grand Council, in its last meeting, has decided that you have spontaneously put yourself out of the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario and therefore out of the Order Sons of Italy Mutual Benefit Society by asking your Regina Elena Lodge to vote against the payment of the 50 cents for the Benevolent Fund.

Therefore, Dear Mrs. Chiavarini, you are no longer considered “sister” of our Order. If you do not agree with the Grand Council’s decision, you may appeal to the Grand Referee Commission as it is established in the third part of our Laws. The time for appealing, as for article 423, is 15 days from the next meeting of the Regina Elena Lodge, which will take place next Tuesday 12, c. m.⁹⁵

Furthermore, the executive of the Ontario Lodge charged that the Grand Financial Secretary, Aurelio Del Piero, had presented the members of the Order an “incomplete”, “false” and “malicious” financial statement: “it is malicious be-

cause its purpose is to deceive us; it has some entries which should not be included: namely the illegal Benevolent Fund and the Sault Ste. Marie Temple, of which we do not know its legal position.”⁹⁶

The dispute between the Grand Council and the executive of the Ontario Lodge came before the Provincial Supreme Court, which decided in favour of the Ontario Lodge and of Mrs. Chiavarini. The following are the Judge’s decisions as appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on 13 May 1938:

Anthony Torella, et al. v. The Orders of Sons of Italy of Ontario Mutual Benefit Society et al. –Motion to continue injunction order of Godfrey J., dated April 28 and a further motion of judgment J. L. Cohen K.C., for application: N.F.A. Scandiffio for respondents. Judgment pronounced for a declaration that the purported dissolution of Lodge Ontario has been revoked and that extra assessment has also been revoked. Cost to the plaintiff.

Genoveffa Chiavarini: v. The Order of Sons of Italy of Ontario Mutual Benefit Society et al. –Motion to continue injunction order of Godfrey, J., dated April 28 and further motion for judgment. Judgment pronounced declaring the plaintiff a member in good standing in Lodge Regina Elena of the Said Order and granting an injunction as to past acts of defendants only. Costs to the plaintiff.

After the Court decision, Mr. Napoleone Costarella, the secretary of the Ontario Lodge, is sharply critical of Tommaso Mari, editor of *Il Bollettino*, member of the Ontario Lodge, and Grand Orator of the Order.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Carlo Fera’s Interview, in the author’s possession.

Costarella wrote:

If the newspaper [*Il Bollettino*] was not before me, I would not believe it. Tommaso Mari speaks of us. Isn't he ashamed: does he think that we are like him? I dare him to come to our Lodge meeting and accuse us of 'embezzlement'⁹⁷ and 'false pretense' there, irresponsible, shameless scam. This Mari who accuses us of 'embezzlement' should know once and for all that we are, as the Judge said, the Ontario Lodge; we have the right to collect [payments]: and also Mari, if he wants to stay in the Order, he must come personally to pay his monthly dues to our secretary and to me, Napoleone Costarella, his assistant.⁹⁸

As a consequence of the court decision the "*Fondo Benevolenza*" was liquidated and the remaining money refunded to the members.

A letter from Libero Sauro, Grand Administrative Secretary, to a brother demanding to have the money he paid returned reveals this:

... the Administration has recently decided to wind up [the Benevolent Fund]; the Lodges have been informed of this decision. They have received special forms which must be filled. In time members will receive a percentage of what they have paid, because it must be considered that \$800.00 has been paid out. Besides, there are liquidation expenses.⁹⁹

Some members argued, however, that since the Grand Officers had acted illegally, they should personally be responsible for all the expenses and the money paid out.

Sauro and the other Grand Administrators must return all the 50 cents they collected. Sauro and the other Grand Administrators are personally responsible for the money they have paid to people who had no right. Then, Sauro and the other Grand Administrators are free to ask or not to ask, those people who received the money but should not legally have received it, for the reimbursement of the \$800.00.¹⁰⁰

This episode widened the gap between the fascists, who used the patriotic sentiments of the members to dominate the Order, and the antifascists who wanted to see upheld the basic principle of an apolitical organization in which all individuals were treated equally by the Order whether members or not. This divide became wider and wider as the events of those years profoundly altered the political-scape of the nations of Europe; particularly damaging for the Order were the anti-Semitic policies instituted by Mussolini in the summer and fall of 1938. These "race" laws marked one of

⁹⁷ Here Mr. Costarella alludes to an episode of "embezzlement" involving Mari. In the early 1930, the Inter-social Committee, which grouped most of the Toronto's Italian associations, offered the course of Italian to the community's children and Mari was the teacher. At the end of the course, Antonio Gatto, the president of the said committee, paid Mari for his services and also gave him the money to pay the Separate School Board for the use of their classroom. When, the following year, the Italian courses were to begin again, the Board asked to be paid for the use of the classroom the year before. It was discovered that Mari had "forgotten" to pay the School Board.

⁹⁸ See "Risposta ad un Ministro del demonio e dell'inganno", *La Voce italo-canadese*, 3 December 1938.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See *Il Lavoratore*, 13 June 1938; Angelo Principe, "The Italo-Canadian Anti-Fascist Press in Toronto," 119-37.

the darkest moments in the history of united Italy and caused a profound split in the country, which drastically affected Italian Canadians and consequently the Order itself.

IV

The alliance of fascist Italy with Nazi Germany or, better, the creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, brought about a reversal of the fascist policy regarding Italian Jews. In 1933, when Hitler seized power in Germany, Mussolini, in his speech at the “*Fiera del Levante*” in Bari, Apulia, attacked the Nazi theory of superiority with contempt:

... Thirty centuries of history allow us to look with supreme pity on certain doctrines nourished beyond the Alps by the progeny of people who ignored writing, the mean to hand down the documents of their lives, at the time when Rome had Caesar, Virgil and Augustus.¹⁰¹

Consequently, when news reached Canada that the Mussolini’s government was about to initiate an anti-Semitic policy, the pro-fascist Italian newspapers dismissed the reports as a communist “invention to stir Jews” against fascism.

Then, when the first anti-Jewish measures became a fact, the same newspapers attempted to dismiss the matter as a problem of religious nature, arguing ambiguously that in fascist Italy there

is no religious discrimination: Jews like Catholics and Protestants are free to express their faith and to attend their synagogues.¹⁰² When, however, they could no longer ignore what was really happening in Italy because press agencies were filling the newspapers with tragic news regarding the fate of the Italian Jews, the pro-fascist Italian Canadian newspapers, echoing the new Italian racist hierarchies, changed their tone. They argued that Italy had the right to keep its national blood pure, to protect its race from being contaminated by other people whose spiritual aims were less idealistic or outright materialistic: “the aims of the Aryan is to build, that of the Jew to possess.”¹⁰³ In line with the new fascist policy, *Il Bollettino* went as far as to publish in weekly installments, the “Record of the elders of Zion,” which the antifascist biweekly, *La Voce italo-canadese*, denounced as a “false document filled with slanders.”¹⁰⁴

Mussolini’s anti-Semitic policy provoked a chorus of protest from every quarter of Canadian society. The Grand Lodges of the Order Sons of Italy both in Ontario and Quebec remained silent. And when the Grand Venerable for Ontario, Dr. Sabetta, was asked to express his and the Order’s position regarding the Italian anti-Jewish policy, he pronounced the following terse statement: “... transitory circumstances whatever they are

¹⁰¹ See Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XXVI, edited by Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, Firenze, La Fenice, 1964, 19.

¹⁰² See *L’Italia nuova* (Montreal), English section, 5 March 1938.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 28 October 1938: “The Arian likes to build; the Jew likes to possess” (la gioia dell’ariano è costruire; la volontà dell’ebreo è possedere).

¹⁰⁴ See *La Voce italo-canadese*, 19 August 1939.

cannot change the position of the Order Sons of Italy.”¹⁰⁵ Like Sabetta, the other Grand Officers, Tommaso Mari, Marco Missori, Zambri, and even Libero Sauro, all of Toronto, remained silent. It was once again the protest of the rank and file, voiced by the Ontario Lodge, that was heard loud and clear. The Lodge approved a motion condemning the racist policy of the fascist government. It, in part, reads as follows:

The Executive Council of the Ontario Lodge of the Sons of Italy, following the instruction given in the preceding regular assembly of the Lodge, approved the following resolution, in its December 25 meeting:

WHEREAS the anti-Semitic policy set up by the Italian Government is not only disapproved by the Italian people and the Italians abroad, but it is absolutely intolerable among the Italians in Canada. [...]

THE ONTARIO LODGE CONDEMNS the fundamental ideas which inspire religious and racial hatred; considering the fact that the Italians, being a racial minority, could someday become themselves victims of such hatred.

THE ONTARIO LODGE REAFFIRMS will and desires to live in harmony and accord with all other nationalities forming the Canadian population, without linguistic, racial and religious distinction.¹⁰⁶

As it can be noted, the Ontario Lodge warned brothers and sisters and the Italian Canadians in general of the danger of racial hatred; it could be used against the Italians themselves, here in Canada.

This was a prophetic warning, considering what happened to Italians when Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940.

Interpreting the sentiments of the majority of Italian Canadians, an ex-member of the Order wrote a letter expressing satisfaction for the courage shown by the Ontario Lodge: “I am pleased to learn that among the Sons of Italy there is a certain opposition to the recent anti-Semitic measures adopted by the ‘Italian government.’”¹⁰⁷ No doubt anti-Semitism was alien to the learned as well as the popular culture of united Italy, and it is hard to understand why the Order’s Grand Officers who individually were not anti-Semitic, could not as a group muster up enough independence from the Consuls and raise their voice of protest, especially considering that even the Catholic Church abandoned fascism in its racial adventure.

V

The silence of the Order Sons of Italy leadership served, unintentionally, perhaps, as passive support of fascist policy from the Ethiopian war on, casting a dark shadow on their loyalty to Canada and its institutions. In fact, this behavior attracted the interest of the RCMP and resulted in fascists being placed under surveillance; a special squad was created and a net of informers was put in place to watch and report on Italian fascists and their activities. One of these informers was none other than Camillo Vetere, the

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 December 1938.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1938.

man who, in 1924, Giuseppe Bastianini, the Director of the Italian Fasci Abroad, trusted to organize fascism in Canada.¹⁰⁸ So the RCMP was well informed on what was going on, not only in the fascist clubs, but even in associations like the Order Sons of Italy, the Veteran Club and the *Dopolavoro*, all under fascist control. In fact, in a 1937 RCMP's report on fascist penetration in the Italian community of Toronto, one reads:

During the last two years, I have noted in this city a profound change in the way the Italians think. They seem to be oriented toward fascism... In studying the community I came to the conviction that it could not have been differently. The Italian population in general is an honest people, workers with little or no education at all. The few intellectual and prominent people who should guide the community have been approached by the fascist Consular authorities and were convinced to join the fascio.¹⁰⁹

No doubt that the Italian consuls tried everything possible to convince Italian immigrants to support fascist Italy. The consuls were instructed to let Italians become Canadian citizens so that they may vote and, being loyal to Italy, could become, under the direction of the consuls and their fascist cohorts, a political pressure group for Mussolini's international policy. In a report to the RCMP, we learn that Consul Paolo De Simone, speaking with a prominent Italian-Can-

dian man, said: "We must [...] work together in a united front in order to keep our immigrants 100% Italian. We should prevent them from becoming Canadians so they may preserve their loyalty to the Italian Government."¹¹⁰

However, besides the Italian consuls' key role in trying to entice Italian Canadian intellectuals to fascist Italy, Canadian authorities were not without blame for such a state of affairs. They never openly and clearly told Italians that they could not be loyal to both fascist Italy and Canada as well. In fact Consul General Rossi-Longhi was essentially right when in June 1940, in a letter of protest against the RCMP, which, in looking for evidences on fascist activities, seized the Consulates' Archives in Montreal and Toronto, he wrote:

I have to point out that the groups which I suppose you have in mind [the fasci of Montreal and Toronto and their satellite organizations] were not in any way in conflict with Canadian law, that they were never kept secret but they acted always in the full light of day for many years and never before now, *have I heard of any objection on this subject by any Canadian authority* [my emphasis]. Moreover, these cultural and after-work groups not only have never promoted, as I read in your letter, principles and conduct involving disloyalty to this country...¹¹¹

Circumstances beyond their control made the greatest majority of Italian Ca-

¹⁰⁸ See *Il Grido della Stirpe* (a N.Y. monthly), 11 August 1925.

¹⁰⁹ RCMP Archives, report dated 29 September 1937, quoted by Luigi Bruti Liberati, *Il Canada, l'Italia e il fascismo: 1919-1945*, Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1984, 172.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, quoted by the RCMP Commander of the Montreal District, 3 July 1937.

¹¹¹ Consul General of Italy Marchese Rossi-Longhi to Under-Secretary of External Affairs O.D. Skelton, dated Ottawa, 19 June 1940, *Documents of Canadian External Relations*, Vol. 7, cit., 155.

nadians, against their deep-rooted convictions, what they never suspected they might become: 'enemy aliens'.

In such a situation, the officers of the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario and Quebec as well, by remaining silent about what was happening to Italian Jews, were isolated in communities across Canada and particularly in Toronto where Italians and Jews had enjoyed a good and long relationship. At the turn of the twentieth century, both ethnic groups shared adjacent neighbourhoods in the 'Ward', the slum area of downtown Toronto. Because of their proximity, many Canadian-born Italians had grown up with Jewish children and they shared friendship. Italian and Jewish women neighbours would babysit for each other. Hence it was normal for Jewish children to speak some Italian and for their Italian buddies to know some Yiddish. Because both groups had experienced the sting of prejudice for religious or social reasons, it was natural to feel strong kinship ties. And, indeed, during the 1933 Christie Pit rebellion in Toronto, many Italian youths fought alongside their Jewish friends against German Canadian Nazis.¹¹²

But the Officers of the Order Sons of Italy in Ontario were either not aware of the feelings of the Italian Canadians or refused to acknowledge them for, in their Grand Convention held in Wind-

sor in February 1940, they made no mention of the issue of the race laws in Italy. Nor did the looming spectre of war move them from their pro-fascist stance.¹¹³ Even Italian Catholic priests sealed their lips regarding fascism. A public condemnation of fascism by Italian priests would have been a boost for the anti-fascists. Contrary to their very active promotion of fascism in the streets and from the pulpit in the 1930s, priests closeted themselves in their churches after the onset of the fascist anti-Semitic legislation. In fact, a RCMP report reads: Father Bortignon, as Chaplain of the Ex-Combattenti, "was certainly pro-Fascist, but today it is difficult to draw a pro-Fascist whisper from him, all his apparent dealings with his congregation being strictly orthodox."¹¹⁴

It was in those immediate pre-war years that the Quebec based *Ordine degli italo-canadesi*, formally Independent Order Sons of Italy, began to expand rapidly in Ontario. It aimed to undo what the consuls and the minions of the Order Sons of Italy and the other quasi-fascist organizations had done and, thereby, keep the Italian community a homogeneous part of the Canadian society at large. Implicit in the word "*Italo-canadesi*" itself is love for Canada, respect for its laws and assimilation in the life of the nation. Within this context, they also wanted to keep alive that aspect which character-

¹¹² See Cyril A. Levitt and William Shoffer, *The Riot at Christie Pit*, Toronto, Lester & Orpen Dennis, 1987, 184-86.

¹¹³ The Grand Convention was held in Windsor on 2 February 1940. Of the older members of the Order, only Frank Zaffiro of Hamilton speaks of that Grand Convention with a triumphant tone, see his "Remembrance", quoted above.

¹¹⁴ See R.C.M.P. *Security Bulletin*. The War Years, 1939-1941, ed. Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker (St. John's Committee on Canadian Labour History), 322.

ized them as Italians.¹¹⁵

When on 10 June 1940, fascist Italy entered the war on Hitler's side, most male Venerable including one woman, Luisa Guagnello, Venerable of the female lodge of Niagara Falls,¹¹⁶ and many lodge members were interned alongside all the Grand Officers of the Order, except for Libero Sauro, a minister of the United Church.¹¹⁷ Sauro acted promptly to save the Order. He obtained from provincial authorities the release of the Order's funds that had been frozen; he travelled across the province where "brothers and sisters" were frightened and disorient-

ed, giving them confidence by reassuring them. He called an "extraordinary" Grand Convention that took place in Toronto in the month of August 1940. At this convention a motion was approved which dissolved the Grand Council and gave, during periods of crisis, extraordinary powers to a five-person committee. However, while the initiative to revive the Toronto's lodges was under way, on 7 September 1940, Sauro himself was interned.¹¹⁸

However, the Order was not decapitated. A group of able women took the reins into their own hands and smooth-

¹¹⁵ Taped Interview with Donald Di Giulio, in the author's possession.

¹¹⁶ On the internment of Mrs. Guagnello, see Angelo Principe, "Italian Canadian Fascist Women and the Government's 'Wishy-Washy' Policy", *Beyond Barbed Wire* (ed. by Licia Canton, Domenic Cusmano, Michael Mirolla, Jim Zuccherro, Toronto: Guernica, 2012), 117-35.

¹¹⁷ As a minister in Niagara Falls, Reverend Sauro was so well accepted that when he "was about to move to Toronto, the Italian community gave him a farwell party and Father [Telesforo] Zazza [the Italian Catholic Priest in the city] presided over it. [...] some time after, such a noble figure [Zazza] as a Priest and as an Italian, departed from this world after a long sickness; Rev. Sauro from Toronto went to Niagara Falls, participated in the funeral and at the tomb, in the Carminati's cemetery, pronounced a moving eulogy in memoriam of the brother who no longer was but whose memory remained indelible in the hearts and minds of all good Italians," see *L'Unione* (cit. An. 2, n. 12, July 1946), 7. Regarding Sauro as a fascist supporter, a "Memorandum" to "The Inter-Departmental Committee" date 28 August 1940, reads: "Prior to 1934 the subject was a strong democrat and a member and organizer of C.C.F. groups. He was at that time the pastor of the Italian United Church at Niagara Falls, Ontario. During the same year he was transferred to Toronto where he occupied his present church and as a result of his association with Mr. Tiberio [Tiberio], then Italian Vice Consul at that point he was won over to the Fascist cause." The report continues and before ending, it states: "Your attention is particularly directed to the personal history Files, submitted on the subject by Camillo Vetere and Orlando Zaganelli, both of whom have been until recently held executive positions in the Fascio and affiliated organizations and are thus in a position to report authoritatively on the subject."

¹¹⁸ An article on the Order's bi-weekly paper, *L'Unione*, implies, without stating Spada's name, that Sauro initially was not interned because, being of the same religious denomination as Antonino Spada, Sauro could be convinced to dissolve the OSIO into the Order Italo Canadese: "Why Brother Sauro was not interned is a mystery. Was it to save or destroy the Order? Some thought to destroy it... this did not happen and, he was interned..." see *L'Unione*, cit., 2. In the RCMP file on the OSIO and fascism is found the translation of an article, which appeared in Toronto's fascist weekly, *Il Bollettino*. The article reports about Sauro's trip to Sault Ste. Marie in 1935. We quote the opening statement only: "Rev. Livero [sic. read Libero] Sauro, of the United Church of St. Paul in Toronto, strenuously defended Italian activity in Ethiopia and Ill [sic, read Il] Duce of whom he spoke with profound admiration in an address which he delivered in a church of his denomination in Sault Ste. Marie and in one before the Rotary Club of the same city." See copy sent to Dr. Cochran by R.J. Miller in "Italian Mission" in the United Church Archives, Toronto.

ly carried on the business of the Grand Lodge for three years, doing as well as men would have done. They were Gemma Galasso, Delfina Vistorino and C. Sauro, taking her husband's post. These "sisters" had full support of the officers of the two Lodges of Sault Ste. Marie: Venerable Carlo Fera and Sam Chiappetta of Lodge Verdi and Tonietta Irvine, Venerable of the Maria Jose Lodge, and many other women belonging to the Order throughout the province.

When the ninth Grand Convention of the Order was held in Toronto on 6 September 1943, fascism had been decapitated in Italy with the arrest of Mussolini; in Canada most of the Italian internees had returned home. In fact, attending the convention, Venerable Romolo Guerriero, just released from Petawawa, announced happily that his Lodge, the Marconi Lodge of Niagara Falls, had been reorganized.

The Convention abolished the Extraordinary Administrative Committee and a normal Grand Consul was elected. It is at this convention that women entered in considerable numbers and have, since then, occupied important positions in the Grand Counsel, though no woman has ever been elected to the top position of Grand Venerable of the Order. Carlo Fera was elected Grand Venerable; his Vice was Romolo Guerriero; Speaker was Sam Chiappetta; Miss Juliet Galasso was elected Secretary; her mother, Gemma Galasso became the Archivist; and Mrs. Delfina Vistorino, Treasurer; Councilors

were Adamo D'Agostino, Luigi Pasquantonio and Mrs. Marietta Fera.

The election of "Miss Juliet," the English name for the Italian 'Giulietta,' indicates that a new generation of young people, born in Canada or who emigrated at a tender age and therefore educated in this country, was taking over the direction of the Order. By the end of the 1940s, most of the active members who were born in Italy were ready to retire. In fact, in the records of the women's Lodge Fiorente, former Loggia Regina Elena, we can readily see the passage from the older Italian generation to the younger Canadian-Italian members; the notes of the lodge consul meetings until February 1955 were taken in Italian; from March on, they were in English. We assume that from 1946 on the Order's direction passed gradually from older Italians to a new Canadian-educated generation.

Before this happened, however, most male officers of the Order and four women experienced the humiliation and harsh life of being interned.¹¹⁹ In their hearts many of them felt betrayed by both the fascist government in Italy, which played on the nostalgia for the old country, and the Canadian government, which cast their loyalty in doubt. Spada very eloquently wrote, in his weekly, *Il Cittadino Italo-Canadese*, about the damage that the policy of insisting on keeping Italians loyal to Mussolini had done to the Italians in general and to the Sons of Italy in particular. He wrote:

The Sons of Italy's patriotism hurts primarily

¹¹⁹ The four women were interned in a special section of the women's quarter at Kingston Penitentiary, see Angelo Principe, "Italian Canadian Fascist Women," 117-35.

them; but it effects us also who are counted and considered as sheep that could become wolves.

We do not want to be thought of as sheep not to remain a flock as is the mentality of the "Sons of Italy"; we don't like to be looked down on; on the contrary we want to be Canadians, loyal, not hostile to Canada which is defending itself as it should.

We ask for the collaboration of the Sons of Italy and, in particular, the collaboration of those men who are free though they should have been interned.¹²⁰

In the 1946 Convention, the Order put its fascist past behind it and began a new chapter as an association. The executive elected at this convention was made up mostly of new people who had been either against or not involved with fas-

cism; their loyalty was mainly to Canada.¹²¹ They began to rebuild the Order since the services it offered through the Mutual Benefit Society were still crucial to Italian working class and small entrepreneurs. The Order began to decline in the 1960s, after the federal government introduced Medicare and consequently mutual benefit societies like the OSIO had run their course. The Order continued on but its goals and its mission were incidental to the new Italian immigrants who poured into Canada in the Fifties and Sixties. In fact, the Order failed them and became largely an organization for second generation Italians and for those who had settled in Canada before the Second World War.

¹²⁰ See *Il Giornale italo-canadese* (Year 1, N. 1), 10 August 1940: in the last statement did Spada allude to Libero Sauro? We don't know though it might be possible.

¹²¹ The people elected were: Carlo C. Fera, Sault Ste. Marie, Grand Venerable; Libero Sauro, Toronto, Past Grand Venerable; Romolo Guerriero, Niagara Falls, Assistant Grand Venerable; Sam Chiappetta, Sault Ste. Marie, Grand Orator; Clementina Sauro, Toronto, Grand Administrative Secretary; Irene Dini, Sault Ste. Marie, Grand Recording Secretary; Delfina Vistorino, Toronto, Grand Treasurer were: Mildred Spizzini, Toronto; Joseph Grittani, Toronto; Andrea De Santis, Toronto; Emilio Squigna, Hamilton; and Evelyn Hupka, Sault Ste. Marie; see Gabriele P. Scardellato, *Within Our Temple* (A History of the Order Sons of Italy of Ontario), Order Sons of Italy of Canada, 1995, 74.