

Italian Radicals in Canada: A Note on Sources in Italy

Franca Iacovetta and Robert Ventresca

Volume 37, 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt37rr02>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Iacovetta, F. & Ventresca, R. (1996). Italian Radicals in Canada: A Note on Sources in Italy. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 37, 205–221.

Italian Radicals in Canada: A Note on Sources in Italy

Franca Iacovetta
Robert Ventresca

FOLLOWING THE FASCIST seizure of power in Italy in October 1922, thousands of Italians hostile to the new regime left their country of origin to escape political persecution and to wage their anti-Fascist campaigns from the relative safety of democracies in Western Europe and the Americas.¹ Anarchists, socialists, and communists left Italy with the intention of continuing in foreign countries their struggle against the state, capitalism, and, of course, Mussolini fascism. In this struggle they were joined by their ideological comrades and co-nationals already settled in countries such as France, Spain, the USA and Argentina. Some of the anti-Fascist emigrés chose Canada as their place of exile. Here they found an active group of Italian leftists already engaged in labour and political radicalism. Together they took up the fight against capitalist exploitation here and Mussolini's regime, helping to build multi-ethnic political organizations. Though the majority of expatriate radicals were men, a number of women were actively engaged in anti-fascist-activity, usually as a part of an entire family of radicals. Some women, however, were militant radicals in their own right, and thus deemed subversive and dangerous by police authorities in North America and in Europe.

¹On the anti-Fascist emigration, see Charles Delzell's *Mussolini's Enemies* (Princeton 1961), especially ch. 2. Published material on Canada is slim but consult, for example, Roberto Perin, "Making Good Fascists and Good Canadians: Consular Propaganda and the Italian Community in Montreal," in Gerald Gold, ed., *Minorities and Mother Country Imagery* (St. John's 1984); Luigi Pennacchio, "The Torrid Trinity: Toronto's Fascists, Italian Priests and Archbishops During the Fascist Era, 1929-40," in M.G. McGowan and B.P. Clark, eds., *Catholics at the Gathering Place* (Toronto 1993); Luigi Bruti-Liberati, *Il Canada, l'Italia e il fascismo, 1919-1945* (Rome 1984) and his *Il Canada e la guerra dei trent'anni: l'esperienza bellica di un popolo multietnico* (Milan 1989).

Franca Iacovetta and Robert Ventresca, "Italian Radicals in Canada: A Note on Sources in Italy," *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 205-20.

The history of the Italian left/Italian anti-Fascism in Canada remains largely unwritten, in part the result of the erroneous assumption that archival records dealing with the subject are insufficient to permit a viable historical reconstruction. This lacuna is especially pronounced given the substantial body of scholarly works on the ethnic left and radical politics among other immigrant groups in Canada. In fact, such records do exist, the single most important of them being the files of the *Casellario Politico Centrale* (Central Political Records Office; hereafter CPC), Italian Interior Ministry, which are housed at the Central State Archives in Rome, Italy. The CPC itself pre-dated the rise of Italian Fascism, having been established in 1894 to engage in the business of political surveillance. In the pre-Fascist era it tracked republicans and anti-monarchists, as well as socialists and anarchists. The Fascist political police who co-ordinated the CPC's surveillance activities after 1922 compiled detailed files on thousands of expatriate radicals, drawing on the reports of Italian consular officials in foreign countries, local police and security officials (in Italy and abroad), and private letters exchanged by the so-called "subversive" expatriates in question. Of the files in the CPC today, approximately 70 per cent were compiled during the Fascist era.

In May 1995, on behalf of Professor Franca Iacovetta of the University of Toronto, Robert Ventresca went to Rome to study the CPC files that pertain to Canada. The assignment was to access the CPC files, to assess the quality and the quantity of the files on Italian radicals living in Canada during the interwar period, and to evaluate the files' overall usefulness and relevance to Canadian, labour, and immigration historiographies. Several US scholars are currently using the CPC files to reconstruct the history of Italian radicals in the USA.² It is evident that the same kind of reconstruction can, and should be done, with the files pertaining to Canada.

According to a preliminary list compiled, the CPC contains at least 111 individual dossiers on Italians who resided in Canada in the interwar era. (25 individual dossiers were copied.) It is important to note that this list includes only those whose place of residence was clearly indicated as Canada. There are hundreds of files on Italian expatriate radicals/anti-fascists whose last place of residence is listed in the CPC index as "*America Nord*" or North America, as opposed to "America" or "USA," a designation that suggests CPC sources were not always sure about the precise whereabouts of the individuals they were following. The confusion or uncertainty was greatest, it seems, when dealing with individuals who lived in border-cities like Detroit, Michigan, or Windsor, Ontario, where some of the more active radicals-anti-fascists (and hence more "dangerous" from the perspective of Fascist officials) moved from one locale to another. A few of the expatriate radicals found actually resided in Canada but were listed in the CPC index as

²For example, Fraser Ottanelli, "'My Body is in America but my mind is in Italy': Italian American Radicalism, 1919-1939," paper presented to North American Labour History Conference, Detroit, October 1994. According to Ottanelli there are close to 6000 individual files in the CPC on Italian antifascists/radicals in the USA.

residents of North America. There may well be dozens, if not hundreds of other dossiers that really pertain to Canada. The figure of 111 "Italian-Canadians" in the CPC files, therefore, should be viewed as a conservative estimate. There is one other caveat that must be considered in this regard: the "Residence" category of the CPC index/files lists only the last known place of residence of the expatriate or emigré in question. An Italian who lived in Canada until, say, 1938 but then emigrated to another country, or returned to Italy while still under CPC surveillance would show up in the CPC index as a resident of some country other than Canada. Any future research of the CPC files pertaining to Canada would have to take this possibility into account, especially since step-migration (that is, immigration to the USA via Canada) and return migration (repatriation) were not uncommon phenomena among Italian emigrants in the 1920s and 1930s.

Along with residential information (CPC officials were usually able to secure a city and residential address of their subject), other categories or variables contained in the CPC files form the basis for extensive biographical profiles of Italian anti-fascists/radicals in Canada. These variables include age, place of birth, paternity, physical description, education, political affiliation, the year and reasons for leaving Italy, trade or profession, occupation in country of adoption, marital status, number of children, and so on. (A cursory examination of these variables reveals, among other things, the preponderance of anti-fascists from northern and central Italy, particularly from regions with traditions of labour and political radicalism.) Categories also existed to explain a person's inclusion in CPC files as subversive, and to indicate the precise nature and extent of police surveillance. Those expatriate radicals deemed to be "dangerous" by CPC officials, for instance, were placed on the *Rubrica di Frontiera* (border index) which alerted Italian border and port authorities should a subversive attempt to enter Italy, even if legally and under the protection of a foreign passport. When possible, CPC officials obtained and circulated a picture of the individual in question, obtained perhaps from the powerful Prefect of the person's province of birth, or from family members still living in Italy.

The impetus to open a dossier on an individual suspected or known to be an opponent of Mussolini's regime often came from Italian consular officials posted in places like Toronto or Montreal. If, for example, consular officials obtained the name of an Italian resident in Canada who subscribed to an anti-Fascist newspaper, a letter or "urgent" memo would be sent off to CPC officials in Rome who might then turn to the Prefect of the province in which the named person was born or had family connections. The Prefect would then provide the CPC with biographical information on the person in question, paying particular attention to the person's political affiliations while in Italy. If it was learned, for instance, that the person in question had been a member in good standing of the Fascist party while in Italy, the entire dossier might be closed. More often, however, communications between Italian officials on both sides of the Atlantic continued periodically, and notes were

made regarding the person's whereabouts, and his or her "political" conduct. CPC officials and consular officials abroad regularly supplied officials in Rome with copies of anti-fascist "propaganda" produced and circulated in Canada or translated copies of anti-fascist articles which appeared in English-speaking newspapers across the country.³ Requests for information on expatriate radicals, and orders to keep track of certain individuals residing in Canada came from Rome regularly, usually from the Head of the Political Police Division of the Ministry of the Interior.

The operations of the CPC were one part of a broad and invasive system of surveillance and political repression typical of the interwar totalitarian dictatorships, of which Mussolini's Italy was the first. For this reason, the CPC is recognized by historians of modern Italy as a critical source with which to better understand the precise nature, organization, and functioning of fascism in Italy. But the CPC files on expatriate Italian radicals belong as much to the history of the various countries in which these men and women resided. The Canadian files in the CPC are no exception. Indeed, more than merely a random collection of individual profiles of Italian radicals in Canada, the Canadian files in the CPC will help to address issues of major importance to labour and immigration historiographies: the history of the Italian left in Canada, the relationship between Italian leftists and their ideological allies in other immigrant communities, the critical role Italian leftists played in building multi-ethnic working-class organizations, police surveillance and political repression of radicals in Canada, the left-right split among Italian-Canadians in the interwar era, and, by extension, the fascist-anti-fascist struggle for the hearts and minds of Italians in Canada. At present, far too little is known about the size and strength of anti-fascist forces in Canada, or about their social bases and geographic placement, a fact which reflects the benign neglect Italian immigration historians have generally displayed towards the subject of oppositional politics and ideological diversity within this particular immigrant-ethnic group.

The Canadian files of the CPC also shed light on the international nature of the Italian anti-fascist movement, and on the connections between Italian-Canadian anti-fascists and their political comrades in Paris, Geneva, New York, Buenos Aires, as well as in Italy. Often, these international connections were of a more intimate nature — for example, an entire family of radicals-anti-fascists could be the subject of CPC surveillance. For instance, Ruggiero Benvenuti, an anarchist living in Toronto had two brothers, also anarchists-anti-fascists, one in France, the other in Italy, who were being tracked by the CPC in the 1920s and 1930s. The information contained in their individual files, while occasionally repetitive, is also

³It should be noted here that Fascist police compiled files separate from the CPC papers pertaining to the activities of "subversive" organizations and anti-fascist newspapers abroad. A cursory examination of the archival index at the Central State Archives in Rome suggests that Canadian anti-fascist organizations and publications were the subject of this sort of police surveillance.

complementary, as CPC officials well knew. Hence, there is a need to keep an international framework in mind when evaluating the individual dossiers for persons resident in one country or another.

The CPC files confirm that the number of Italian leftists-anti-fascists in Canada was relatively small; the anti-fascists were a decided minority among Italian-Canadians by the start of the 1930s, and thus their influence among their compatriots, until the start of World War II at least, was limited. Still, as the CPC files reveal, small but organized and vocal groups of expatriate radicals and anti-fascists could be found across Canada. The major centres seem to have been Toronto, Montreal, and Windsor, but groups of Italian anti-fascists could be found in Sault Ste. Marie, Niagara Falls, Calgary, and Vancouver. The CPC files contain detailed information regarding the operations of these groups, as well as the activities and whereabouts of group leaders. Thus, these files are the logical starting point for a history of the Italian left in Canada; the information contained in the individual dossiers of the CPC serve to mark names, places, and dates of significance in the story of the Italian left-anti-fascism in Canada, and suggest something of the nature of the link between labour radicalism and the struggle against Mussolini fascism in Canada and in their country of origin. At the very least, the rich biographical information they provide permits a viable analysis of the social bases of radical politics within the Italian immigrant community in Canada. This, in turn, provides the basis for comparative analyses of radical politics among Canada's immigrant groups, and more generally may raise new questions and insights regarding the character of the left in Canadian history.

The CPC files are a valuable historical source. Canadian researchers would benefit immensely from access to the Canadian files. A team of French researchers several years ago completed a project to catalogue and have placed on microfiche all CPC files relating to Italian antifascists in France. One of the chief archivists at the Central State Archives, Mr. Robustelli has indicated to us that their archives would be most amenable to a similar project on the Canadian files. The telephone numbers of the Archives are 6-5926204/6652/0371. The fax number is 06-5413620.

Appendix I

Italians resident in Canada or North America as they appear in the index of the *Casellario Politico Centrale* (Central Political Records Office or CPC), Italian Ministry of the Interior, Archivio Centrale Dello Stato (Central State Archives), Rome, Italy.

Compiled May 1995
Subject to Revision

* Indicates dossiers photocopied

Name Busta # Date of Dossier

Albanese, Nicodermo 41 1930-42	*Amadori, Aldo 86 29-40
*Amadori, Roberto 87 34-43	*Amadori, Ivo 87 29-40
Antonuccio, Giuseppe 163 31-42	Appignani, Alfredo 167 38-43
Aquilini, Antonio 169 32-35	Aquilini, Urbano 169 31-43
*Artico, Egidio 202 N/A	Artico, Giovanni 202 N/A
Baratta, Giovanni 312 39-41	Beduz, Pietro 435 29-41
Benni, Luigi 502 29-31	Bennie, Paoletto 503 27-38
*Benvenuti, Ruggero 508 32-43	Bianco, Giuseppantonio 627 32-42
*Bortolotti, Attilio 772 29-41	Bottos, Beniamino 798 N/A
*Brescia, Giuseppe 832 36-43	*Brescia, Vincenzo 832 36-43
Busca, Terzo 905 32-41	Calvaruso, Francesco 960 29-40
Cappuccilli, Matteo 1048 29-41	Cardone, Giuseppe 1076 23-33
Centa, Bortolo 1241 1939	Centa, Luigi Benedetto 1241 38-42
Chiarini, Ettore 1295 27-39	Ciarrocca, Nino 1328 29-38
Coleffi, Giuseppe 1402 27-42	*Colistro, Fortunato 1405 1936
Comai, Alfredo 1425 26-42	Conci, Gustavo 1435 1936
Cosco, Giovanni 1498 31-43	Costa, Joe 1507 1929
Cudin, Innocente 1553 37-41	Cudin, Leonilda 1553 38-41
Cuzetto, Pasquale 1566 36-43	Dal Bello, Angelo 1576 29-33
Dal Bello, Giovanni 1576 29-30	DeFelice, Domenico 1652 26-39
Deganis, Pietro 1657 38-41	Del Ben, Antonio 1668 29-41
D'Enico, Gustavo 1745 35-40	Di Fonzo, Salvatore 1784 30-41
*Duliani, Mario 1870 29-42	Durigon, Vincenzo 1873 29-41
Elia, Luigi 1879 30-33	Fantacci, Giulio 1945 29-38
Filistini, Feliziano 2066 11-43	Fratini, Giovanni 2173 39-40
Gabbani, Vincenzo 2211 07-40	*Gava, Ernesto 2317 31-42
Gemma, Luciano 2328 38-40	Ghetti, Giulio 2355 29-40
Giambattistoni, Lanterio 2381 38-40	Giambattistoni, Gustavo 2381 37-40
*Giancotti, Nicola 2385 N/A	Gioventu, Bonfiglio 2441 30-42
*Issepon, Angelo 2649 N/A	Leone, Francesco 2766 31-39
Magni, Mario 2931 30-37	Manarin, Pietro 2968 30-39

- Marinig, Diego 3070 39-42
 Mariotti, Enzo 3075 29-40
 Meneguzzi, Pio 3224 37-41
 Montanari, Vincenzo 3366 28-30
 Nardini, Ernesto 3493 30-39
 Perlini, Giuseppe 3867 34-43
 Petrocchi, Torello 3906 28-43
 Piatti, Santo Ernesto 3933 38-42
 Piraine, Salvatore 3995 38-39
 *Pomanti, Annina 4072 29-41
 *Pomanti, Giuseppe 4072 29-41
 Presot, Elisabetta 4121 38-42
 Regaini, Sante 4264 28-29
 Ricciatti, Alberto 4312 31-40
 *Romanin, Giuseppe 4386 N/A
 Sabetta, Antonio 4511 32-35
 Scerbo, Antonio 4681 27-36
 *Sovran, Amadio 4883 29-42
 *Sovran, Luigi 4883 30-42
 Talevi, Giuseppe 5010 08-36
 Tallini, Giuseppe 5011 05-42
 Tosi, Angelo 5180 29-41
 Vian, Carlo 5395 29-30
 *Vietti, Maurizio 5408 27-43
 Zucchet, Gelindo 5604 30-41
 *Mariotti, Fortunato 3075 29-40
 Martignano, Umberto 3094 27-35
 Montanari, Pietro 3365 27-42
 Moscardelli, Domenico 3435 N/A
 Nimis, Marco Antonio 3543 38-42
 Petris, Ermenegildo 3905 38-42
 Petruccioli, Settimie 3912 19-41
 Piccinato, Antonio 3940 29-38
 Poloniato, Giovanni 4070 1940
 *Pomanti, Giovanni 4072 29-41
 *Pomanti, Rosa 4072 29-41
 Rastello, Giovanni 4235 13-36
 Remedi, Giovanni 4273 28-43
 Rolle, Giuseppe 4377 12-41
 Ruzzin, Severino 4504 28-35
 *Scalera, Domenico 4651 N/A
 Serafini, Ernesto 4751 29-36
 *Sovran, Giacomo 4883 30-42
 *Sovran, Giovanni 4883 30-42
 Talevi, Fortunato 5010 35-43
 Tecchi, Ardimere 5054 09-39
 Vettorel, Francesco 5390 01-43
 Viccelli, Mario 5399 1929
 Vigna, Pietro 5412 29-41

Appendix II

SAMPLE FILE: Antonio SPADA

The following is the complete file of Antonio Spada, named in the CPC records as a Communist and militant anti-fascist. In fact, Spada was the leading anti-fascist in Montreal, and one of the more active in all of Canada. Spada organized and led the anti-fascist Matteoti Club of Montreal (named after the young Italian Socialist leader and principal foe of Mussolini slain by fascist thugs, possibly at Mussolini's behest, in June 1924). He also played the critical role in establishing the Independent Order of the Sons of Italy to provide an anti-fascist counterweight to the already fascistized Order of the Sons of Italy. It should be noted that the communications of this copy are in the order in which they were found. The records of all individual dossiers were usually organized in reverse chronological order, so that the last communication regarding the individual in question appears at the start of the dossier. Spada's file is somewhat different in this regard. Note that in most instances, hand written messages and letters were type-copied, making the dossiers eminently readable.

What follows is a copy of a report that appears in the dossier of Antonio Spada concerning anti-fascist activity in Montreal. Spada and the Matteotti Club were closely watched by Consular officials. It appears that the original report was sent by the Italian Consulate in Montreal to the Italian Minister of the Interior who, in turn, passed a copy along to the Central Political Records Office.

DOCUMENT ONE

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

General Management of Public Security

General and Confidential Affairs Division

Rome, 29 September 1934

Central Political Records Office

Head Office

It gives me pleasure to transcribe the following report, of the Royal Consulate in Montreal, Canada:

"Last Sunday, the local Antifascist "Matteotti" Club, in collaboration with the Mazzini Society, held the customary antifascist picnic, which takes place every year during the summer.

About 150 people attended the picnic, half of whom were Italian; most of these are already known to and identified by this office for their sentiments against the Regime. The police, the Chief of which I have personally spoken, employed rigorous measures to ensure order, forbidding both political speeches and street demonstrations.

The Matteotti Club was founded in Montreal ten years ago, the principal animating figure behind it being the anarchist Antonio Spada, an individual repeatedly noted by this office. The Club is based in the neighbourhood of Ville Emard, an area inhabited by many Italians and until recently a stronghold of the subversive parties of Montreal. In the past, the Club carried out noteworthy antifascist activity, but since it moved to Ville Emard, a Fascist section, which today has about seventy comrades, energetic and active, and an Italian language course, the Matteotti Club has seen its numerical importance and the number of followers diminish. I myself, as I have already mentioned, have often gone to Ville Emard to address publically that collectivity, in the middle of which many antifascists mingled: and here my direct campaigning proved to be the best and most rapid way to get the majority to abandon the positions of the Regime's adversaries, many of them not even knowing for certain just why they had been adversaries of the Regime.

The activity and development of our fascist organizations in Montreal over the past months naturally gets on the nerves of the subversive parties and the Jewish element, which is very strong in this city; and since public opinion attributes this reawakening of activity to my direct campaigning and the fact

that I am constantly in touch with the mass of the collectivity, which shows itself glad and for this responds to my appeal, it is for this that it is above all against me that the antifascist organizers, whether Italians or Canadians, concentrate. And since, according to local practice, the ends justify the means, they don't split hairs in the attempt to undermine my influence with the large part of the collectivity, without much success I must add, at least until now.

Thus, for instance, a few days ago, while I was in St. John, New Brunswick to visit the Royal Agency and collectivity in that city, there was an attempt — in a somewhat childish manner, of course, but nevertheless capable of provoking nervousness among a mass of uncultured people — to sabotage my last efforts before closing the subscription for the Casa d'Italia.* Special emissaries, in fact, equipped with modes of transportation and instructed by Spada and Company, travelled throughout the working-class neighbourhoods inhabited by our Italians and spread the rumour ... that I had fled with the funds collected for the Casa d'Italia!

Naturally, the attempt ended in farce and provoked, as a reaction, a more intense collection of subscriptions, but I mention this episode to give you an idea of the means to which our antifascist ringleaders could resort, apparently with the support of local parties opposed to the Regime.

For my part, naturally, I will only intensify my work aimed at making the whole of the collectivity a single whole of force and of fascist ideality.

Order of the Minister

(Signed...)

P.C.C.

Head of First Section

* The Casa d'Italia, which could be found in various Italian communities across Canada in the interwar era, were community-based centres financially supported through community subscriptions. They became fronts for fascist activity after 1923.

Spada's anti-fascist agitation was not limited to the activities of the Matteotti Club alone. Spada helped found the Independent Order of the Sons of Italy, an organization which provided an anti-fascist counterweight to the fascistized Order of the Sons of Italy. The item transcribed below illustrates the internal politics of the organized Italian-Canadian community, and hints at the interaction between the country's two major federal parties and the various organizations of Italians in Canada before the start of World War II. The letter was sent from the Italian Consulate in Ottawa to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Political Affairs Division of the Ministry of the Interior in Rome:

DOCUMENT TWO

Ottawa, 15 June 1936

Independent Order of the Sons of Italy

As his Excellency is aware, there exists in Montreal an "Independent Order of the Sons of Italy" whose activity, though superficially that of a mutual aid society, is inspired by sentiments against the Fascist Regime, as evidenced by the fact that the Order is completely in the hands of the well-known Antonio Spada, a dangerous anarchist, object of previous correspondence, and someone most certainly in communication with international antifascist organizations.

The above-mentioned Order has always been protected by certain influential members of the Liberal party currently in power; this is confirmed by the fact that the Right Honourable le Rinfret, Secretary of State in the federal Cabinet, is the Order's honorary President.

With the accession of the Liberal party to power, it is understandable that the Order in question feels even more protected, and is looking to redouble its activity. The majority of its adherents do not share the antifascist ideas of their leader, but being individuals of modest condition, they are easily dominated, and are more concerned with the social assistance fund of the Order than with the political activity of he who leads it.

To give you a recent example, the well-known Protestant minister Augusto Bersani, to whom the Royal Consul in Montreal and this office have often referred, was admitted to the above-mentioned order as "Brother Norario". Now it is noted that Bersani is an extremely dangerous enemy of Fascism and Catholicism in this country, availing himself of the help of influential figures, help which comes to him as a result of his membership in the protestant Clergy.

For my part, I have always assumed an attitude of open struggle toward the Order in question and toward the leader Antonio Spada in particular, so much so that I didn't hesitate to throw the above-mentioned Mr. Spada out of this office in 1933 when he came to see me making obscure threats.

Most recently Spada, evidently motivated by local political considerations, requested the incorporation of the society's constitution, with the aim of widening its activity to the rest of Canada, even though in reality it can only operate in the province of Quebec.

In the proposal for incorporation, which was entitled "An Act to incorporate the Independent Order of the Sons of Italy", it was stated that members of the Society must be persons of Italian origin resident in Canada, that the Society's mandate included the promotion of mutual aid, the promotion and development among members of the Society of a fraternal, mutualistic spirit, to educate members in history, the constitution and legislation of Canada, in the hope of making them good Canadian citizens, to foster the development of intellectual education, to promote the study of the sciences, music, and or art in general

Given such aims, one can conclude that said Society has as its objective activity which greatly exceeds the scope of mutual aid. The title of the request for incorporation, given the fact that its members must be of Italian origin, caused something of a storm in this [i.e. Canadian] senate, provoked by the Senator Hardy, a rich chemical products manufacturer, who confused the above-mentioned Order of the independents with the actual Order of the Sons of Italy. He attacked both of them on the basis of the fact that the Lodge of the Sons of Italy in Windsor, which is a branch of the grand Lodge of the Sons of Italy of Ontario, promised him a membership in return for the offer of aid in the form of money and gold, according to the above-mentioned Senator; "the continuation of the Italian war in Ethiopia": the Honourable Hardy inferred that the request for incorporation of the Independent Order of the Sons of Italy at the very moment Canada was applying sanctions against Italy, and was preoccupied with the Ethiopian developments for their repercussions on the future of the League of Nations, must be regarded as a challenge against the people of Canada. He therefore characterized the proposed incorporation as inappropriate and ill-advised.

Some Liberal senators attempted, in vain, to defend the request, given that Conservative Senator Meighen, leader of the opposition in the Senate, capitalized on Senator Hardy's "gaffe" to ask for a postponement of discussions on the matter, keeping in mind the potential delicacy of the question from an international standpoint. This occurred in the senate 26 May. The following day the discussion of the request in question was resumed, and Senator Hardy, opportunely if belatedly persuaded by his Liberal colleagues, hurriedly declared that he had no intention to cause through his statements of the preceding day international complications, offering therefore a hurried retraction ... Given that the majority in the Canadian Senate is comprised of Conservatives, and since these were informed that the proposed extension of the activity of the Independent Order of the Sons of Italy of Montreal is designed to increase the Liberal influence among Italians in Canada, it seems reasonable to believe that incorporation will not at this point in time be realized.

There nevertheless remains the problem of finding a way to repress the work the Order and above all the noted Spada is pursuing in Montreal ...

Along with the organized anti-fascist groups, there were dozens, if not hundreds, of Italian emigrants resident in Canada who conducted a personal war against fascism, and for this faced Fascist surveillance and political persecution. A compelling case to emerge from the Canadian files of the *CPC* is that of Alessandro Issepon, a labourer who emigrated from Treviso, Italy to Niagara Falls, Ontario in 1920. In March 1933, Issepon wrote a letter to Italy's King Victor Emanuele III in which he openly denounced the king's complicity in Mussolini's dictatorship, and accused Victor Emanuele of being responsible for the Fascist's rise to power ten years earlier. Issepon was careful to point out his record of patriotic duty and loyalty to the Republic during World War I. His uncompromising loyalty to the House of Savoia, the Italian Royal Family, even after the war, so raised the ire of the more radical republican and "red" elements in his home town, wrote Issepon, that he was forced to leave Italy for a new life in Canada. Parts of Issepon's letter are translated below.

DOCUMENT THREE

Mr. Victor Emanuel of Savoia,
Quirinale, Rome.

Mr. Victor, you will most certainly be offended to hear yourself referred to by a simple title, the kind one gives to any man, even to a jail-bird, instead of hearing yourself referred to as Your Majesty, a title which is rightfully yours given your position as king. I would therefore like to make you understand why I feel I must treat you as my equal, and then you can judge for yourself whether I have done this because I have risen to your station, or because you have been lowered to mine, or below. Be patient, Mr. Victor, I will explain.

It is by inheritance that you were my beloved king, as you were for well over 40,000,000 other residents of the peninsula, always by inheritance ... do you understand me? At your coronation I was but a child of five years, I can't remember the ceremonies but I imagine that even you swore to defend with fairness the right of every citizen regardless of class, and also to observe with loyalty the statute instituted by your ancestors

What you did afterward I cannot know ... at the age of 17, in order to live, I was forced to take to the streets of Germany where the people, the customs, the land, the language, the laws, were for me completely unknown. And still, the love

of my country and my king was never any less In October 1922, like lightening in a calm sky, I was astonished by the news of Mussolini's seizure of power against the will of the Majority and with the consensus of my king. From that moment on Mr. Victor, you committed a chain of errors, and from then on I have not considered yours a government worthy of respect, but have waited patiently hoping that my king would realize his first mistake But the months have passed with the plentiful distribution of castor-oil and blows with a cudgel, punitive expeditions, with fires and assassins, imprisonments and tortures, and still the king did not intervene. They form a fascist militia which swears on the life of Mussolini, and which one day will sweep away your army and replace the throne with Mussolini, my king does not speak, they destroyed the old statute, my king still quiet, they gave part of Rome to the Pope after Giuseppe Garibaldi did so much to liberate it, and my king is always happy. I, Mr. Victor, have risked death to remain faithful to my oath, you violated it because you fear for the crown, you destroyed the Statute, the one you were sworn to uphold, therefore you no longer have the right to be my king I have one other thing to ask of you in return for all I have done for the Fatherland and for you Mr. Victor, and also in return for my sincerity since I do not want and do not need to hide under a false name (I feel like a soldier not a coward). I have a mother, a brother, a sister and relatives whom I haven't seen in 13 years, and whom because of my aversion to fascism, I can no longer see, and knowing their innocence I ask that they be left to live in peace. On my part, I do not ask for protection, I have destined to fight for the liberty of the Fatherland and knowing how far the national shame has reached, I have taken the necessary precautions.

I implore you once again to believe this letter is not written by an intellectual; because I lacked the necessary means, I barely finished the Third Elementary, therefore every mistake of penmanship must be acknowledged without devaluing the purpose of the letter. With faith at being able once more to salute you as my king, for now I give you as a friend my sincere greetings

Alessandro Issepon

—

This item is taken from the file of Attilio Bortolotti, named in the CPC files as one of the most "dangerous" of the anti-fascist radicals in Canada. His name appears not only on the list of "subversives" in Windsor, Ontario, translated below, but also in the *Bollettino delle Ricerche* (Research Bulletin), which was reserved for the most militant anti-fascists. The radicals' propensity to move across oceans and borders without authorities noticing made the circulation of their photos with some biographical information crucial to the work of Fascist political police in Europe and the Americas. A copy of Bortolotti's abstract from the *Bollettino*, which contains his photo, is also included below:

DOCUMENT FOUR

Ministry of the Interior
General Management of Public Security
General and Confidential Affairs Division
(received 20 November 1929)

List of Subversives in Windsor Ontario.

- 1) Bortolotti, Attilio, son of Luigi and Maria Pittana, about 26 years old, born in Codripo, province of Udine.
- 2) Serafini Ernesto of Aldorbrando, born in Fossombrone, province of Pesaro 25 June 1866, married with children, resident in Windsor, Ontario.
- 3) Gheti, Giulio of the lates Aldorbrando and Vivani Filomena, born 6 October 1889 in Fossombrone (Pesaro), married with children in Windsor, normally a shoemaker, presently sells bread.
- 4) Sovran, Amadio of Agostino and Lenardon Maria, born in San Martino al Tagliamento (Udine) 25 January 1894, labourer, married with children in Windsor.
- 5) Vian, Carlo of the late Domenico and Dibasso Teresa, born 21 March 1893 in Rebeirao Preto, Brazil, of Italian parents, married with children in Windsor.
- 6) Beduz, Pietro of Luigi, born in Vigomovo, Municipality of Fontana Fredda, province Udine, married with children resident in Windsor, lives selling contraband liquor.
- 7) Artico, Giovanni and family, Friulans.
- 8) Giuseppe Tubaro, Friulan.
- 9) Piccinato Antonio, labourer, Friulan, with family resident in Windsor.
- 10) Del Ben Antonio, young Friulan.
- 11) Manarin Pietro, Friulan.
- 12) Mariotti Fortunato and Enzo, cousins, born in Fano, province of Pesaro.
- 13 Dorigon Vincenzo (known as Venezia).

In June 1940, Mario Duliani, an Italian immigrant from the province of Istria in northern Italy, was interned along with several hundred Italians at Camp Petawawa in northern Ontario. He was branded a fascist by authorities. Duliani, who has achieved some repute in Canadian literary circles for his fictionalized account of the internment experience (*La ville sans femmes* or *The City Without Women*), consistently disavowed any connection to fascist organizations in Canada or abroad. In recent years, evidence has come to light which suggests that, protestations to the contrary, Duliani actually acted as an informant for the Fascist secret police, or the OVRA. Some Italian-Canadians have reacted with vehement opposi-

tion to the claim, arguing that there is simply too little evidence to corroborate the charge. Surprisingly, Mario Duliani shows up in the records of the *CPC* as an anti-fascist. Further reading of the file, however, strongly suggests that Duliani was sympathetic to Mussolini's regime and prepared to render his services to fascism.

DOCUMENT FIVE

From the Ministry of External Affairs to the First Section of the Division of Political Police, Central Political Records Office, 25 September 1929:

"The Royal Ambassador in Paris, with whom I had communicated regarding the enquiries ... gave me the following information:

"Awaiting completion of information requested, here are the elements already known for some of the individuals indicated by the informant

MARIO DULIANI. He joined the freemasonry ("Ernest Renan" Lodge) in 1919 in order to campaign in our favour, especially on the question of Fiume. He was quickly admitted on behalf of the Venerable of the Lodge, Mr. Huart, editor of the "*Temps*". Duliani informed the Royal Embassy of his intentions.

With his aims realized, he told the Venerable frankly that he had no intention of staying in the freemasonry, and never again did he set foot in the lodge, before the Fascist Regime.

Duliani can be criticized for a certain thoughtlessness but as for his love of country and loyalty to the Regime, it seems difficult to have any doubts about him. He is well liked in French circles for his good character, and for the care he takes to always "round off the corners": he is considered an excellent Italian and fascist ... Today, though his name does not appear in the heading of the newspaper, he manages a new French daily (*Paris-Press*), on tourism and international affairs, which is owned by a rich capitalist from Montreal (Canada) "*Paris-Press*" welcomes everything which could be considered agreeable, and it balances in some way the freemason mouthpiece "*L'Amille Francaise*".

Duliani is always at the ready of, and deferent to, the organs of the Royal Embassay, and he seeks to make the most of all Italians who do something good.

—

Anti-fascism was sometimes a family affair, as is evidenced by the following item which contains information on an entire family of "subversives." In this case, though it was the Pomanti brothers who were initially the subjects of *CPC* surveillance, female family members, too, came to be considered independent actors in the family's anti-fascist campaign. Below is transcribed a letter sent from the Prefect of Teramo, the native province of the Pomanti family, to the Italian

Ministry of the Interior. The Prefect described the nature of the Pomanti family's political activities before they moved to Toronto. While the Prefect's information suggests that the Pomantis were not engaged in anti-fascist activity before they left Italy, they had in fact emigrated around the time Mussolini began to stamp out the forces of opposition. Hence the Prefect's reference to "verifications" being carried out by consular authorities in Toronto on the Pomanti family's political persuasion:

DOCUMENT SIX

Regal Prefecture of Teramo
25 January 1929

Object: Pomanti brothers, resident
in Toronto, Ont (Canada)

Hon. Ministry of the Interior
General Management of Public Security
ROME

An anonymous tip sent to the local police headquarters from Toronto, Ontario (Canada) names as fervent communists the Pomanti brothers, living there at 211 University Ave ... From the information gathered about them in their town of origin, Pietracamela, it emerged that they are individuals of good moral and political conduct, and that never during their time in the Fatherland did they profess subversive ideas.

Nevertheless, in case, while abroad, there formed in the same a different political conscience, I note them to the honourable Ministry for verification to be conducted by the consular officials of the place [*i.e. Toronto*].

- 1) Pomanti Giuseppe, of the late Eliseo and Leone Santa, born in Pietracamela 5 November 1907, emigrated about three years ago —
- 2) Pomanti Giovanni, born in Pietracamela 24 June 1910 —
- 3) Pomanti Rosa, born in Pietracamela 5 November 1899 —
- 4) Pomanti Annina born in Pietracamela 19 November 1904.