

## Article 2

### Italian Language Print Media in Sydney: A Short History of *La Fiamma* Newspaper

The Italian language newspaper, *La Fiamma* ('The Flame' or 'Beacon'), has been an institution in Sydney and beyond for over fifty years, and it has maintained a constant association with the suburb of Leichhardt. *La Fiamma*'s sub-title from 1951, *Il Giornale degli Italiani di Australia*, 'The Newspaper of Italians in Australia', makes clear its primary function and rationale. When it was first published in 1947, *La Fiamma* met a need that Italians would otherwise have been denied, news from Italy and international and local news in Italian (and English) as well as articles designed to assist directly with the problems of settlement.

The origins of *La Fiamma* date to 1946 and are closely linked with the Catholic Church and the Capuchin Order. *La Fiamma* evolved from an idea for an Italian language newspaper that Fr Giuseppe La Rosa expressed in 1945 to the Sydney Archdiocese. Fr La Rosa was attached to the Apostolic Delegation in Sydney for the duration of the war, having been prevented from returning to Italy by the outbreak of hostilities. In 1942 La Rosa was appointed chaplain of the Italian-born community — many of whom were at that time in internment camps — by the then Archbishop, Cardinal Norman Gilroy.

One motive for the founding of a newspaper with a strong religious and spiritual content was the perceived need to combat the 'radical, anti-clerical' newspaper *Il Risveglio* (The Awakening) that began operation in 1944.<sup>1</sup> *Il Risveglio* was the first Italian language newspaper in Australia after the end of the Second World War. As Gaetano Rando reports, it was published by the Australian-based anti-Fascist movement Italia Libera, after permission was granted in 1944 by the Attorney-General, H.V. Evatt. Claudio Alcorso was an early editor. *Il Risveglio* ceased publication in 1956.

In April 1946, the Australian Government responded positively to a request from Fr La Rosa to publish an Italian language newspaper. However, the restrictions and limitations imposed meant that permission, for a newspaper that was to be called *L'Apostolo*, was not acted

on. Cardinal Gilroy was in favour of a newspaper directly under the control of the Archdiocese and run by an association, consisting of a representative of the Diocesan Office, the Provincial of the Capuchin Friars, and Mr Ulisse Pellegrini (of *Pellegrini's*, the shop of religious books and articles situated in Roma House in George Street in the city) who had expressed an interest in financing the venture.

*La Fiamma* Pty. Ltd. was formed in April 1947, and the newspaper *La Fiamma* had its first issue on 15 April 1947. At the end of 1947, Fr La Rosa gave up direction of the newspaper, and the American-born Capuchin friar of Italian descent Fr Anastasio Paoletti took over as director and editor-in-chief. Gilson and Zubrycki record an interview of 25 July 1961 with Fr Paoletti, in which he is reported to have said that he realised two years after beginning the newspaper that 'by devoting it entirely to religious affairs we would not attract a wide readership' (Gilson 35). Once a decision to broaden its scope was made, 'from then on it was all plain sailing...when [Evasio] Costanzo took over [in 1951] he easily implemented the policy of devoting the newspaper largely to news but news presented objectively in a true Christian spirit' (Paoletti, as reported in Gilson 36).

The first monthly issue of *La Fiamma* consisted of four pages in magazine format. For a number of years the newspaper was sold exclusively through subscription. A newspaper published in Italian in the immediate postwar years was of course not readily saleable on the open market. First of all, it was a small-scale operation in the early years and circulation was limited by available resources; and secondly, Italians themselves were reticent about subscribing to an Italian language publication. As Davino Zadro recalled of the days in May-June 1947, when he delivered newspapers by hand, subscribers were afraid to receive it:

Il nome stesso del giornale era una sfida: a quell'epoca era pericoloso parlare in italiano, figuriamoci stampare un giornale in lingua straniera e per giunta, in una lingua di ex nemici.

The name of the newspaper itself was a challenge; in those days it was dangerous to speak Italian, let alone publish a newspaper in a foreign language that was, moreover, in the language of an ex-enemy.<sup>2</sup>

**RESURREZIONE**

Era morto. L'avevano sepolto. E così, anche i suoi. L'avevano tradito, reso segno abbandonato. L'avevano sparato, come le profezie pareva di essere: fra tre anni contro la sua patria del sepolcro. Soltanto, era, si diceva, ancora viva. E così, mentre le ombre si addensano sulla terra dei morti, e lo piangono sconfortati. Poi tutto luce, nel silenzio della notte, e Gesù resta solo, nella tomba vuota, vigilato dai soldati di Cesare.

Spiega l'atto della grande dimora. E le donne, nei pantaloni, scendono al sepolcro.

Al primo albero del mattino una donna si accosta agli altri. Il morto si sveglia. L'Unguento sparisce dal cado ad aprire la porta al suo Signore, e si muove. Il suo agguato era fuggiasco come la folgore e di giorno non vedi neanche come è nera.

Il giorno, sospeso e impareggiato, qualcuno, cercano, nessuno. C'è la forza grande ancora penetrata nella tomba vuota.

Ma non, una donna ha rotto. Anzi, una donna ha rotto. E così, una donna ha rotto. E così, una donna ha rotto. E così, una donna ha rotto.



**TRIONFI DI ROMA CATTOLICA**  
GRANDIOSA MANIFESTAZIONE DEGLI ITALIANI DI FEDELTA' AL SOMMO PONTEFICE

Tutti i giornali hanno riportato puntualmente la notizia della grande sfilata del popolo romano in Piazza San Pietro, in presenza del Sommo Pontefice, il 15 aprile scorso. Da quella sfilata, che fu una delle più belle e più commoventi, si può dire che si è consumata la grande Roma che era stata promessa in questi giorni.

La sfilata di Roma ha una storia che si è consumata in questi giorni. Da una parte, si è consumata la grande Roma che era stata promessa in questi giorni. Da un'altra parte, si è consumata la grande Roma che era stata promessa in questi giorni.

Sydney during the 1930s, joined the early staff of *La Fiamma*. Battistessa, together with Filippo Maria Bianchi, subsequently manager of the A.P.I.A. Club, was responsible from 1932 for the bi-lingual weekly, *Il Giornale Italiano*. In 1940, *Il Giornale Italiano* was the last of the Italian publications suppressed when Italy entered the war in 1940. Battistessa played over many years a significant role through the print media in exposing racism and discrimination directed at Italians living in Australia.

Zadro was a committed supporter of *La Fiamma*. As Rando reports, he 'undertook an extensive door-knock campaign to promote the new paper' (Rando 205). Zadro regularly used short-wave radio to gather sports and other news from Italy, later printed in the newspaper. He became sports editor when Evasio Costanzo (subsequently proprietor of the newspaper) was appointed editor-in-charge in 1951. Zadro's twenty-year association with the newspaper is reported in the newspaper's anniversary supplement of 29 July 1967. Zadro records the collaboration of the first regular Italian correspondent, Professor Caporale, *La Fiamma's* first Australian correspondent, G. Linarello, who was based in Adelaide, as well as the work of Margherita Calvi who started in the office as secretary and later became editor of 'L'angolo delle donne'.<sup>3</sup>

*The first issue of La Fiamma newspaper, 15 April 1947.*

During 1947, *La Fiamma* was prepared for publication in a room in Roma House and printed by Cresta. At the beginning of 1948, the office moved to Cusa House and printing was in the hands of O'Loughlin Brothers, near Central Station. In the early 1950s, as Fr Atanasio Gonelli has reported, the main office of *La Fiamma* was in Cusa House in the city, the linotype section in Annandale and the printer in Parramatta. *La Fiamma* progressed in 1948 from monthly to fortnightly publication. Its first weekly edition appeared on 12 August 1949. In 1951, the same year the newspaper moved to a tabloid format, its first Leichhardt office was established. The large format was dropped after a few years in favour of the afternoon paper format that was easier to read on the bus or tram. By 1958, publication was twice a week, with an official circulation of around 28,000.

In the early years, Davino Zadro was principal editor. Others, including Franco Battistessa who had worked on Italian language newspapers in

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**ITALY'S NEW CONSTITUTION and the Lateran Pacts**

The new constitution of Italy, which was approved by the Constituent Assembly in 1947, marks a significant turning point in the country's history. It is a document that reflects the aspirations of the Italian people for a more democratic and just society. The constitution is a testament to the resilience and courage of the Italian people in the face of adversity.

The Lateran Pacts, which were signed in 1929, have been a subject of debate and discussion in Italy. They are a set of agreements that have shaped the relationship between the Italian state and the Catholic Church. The pacts have been both praised and criticized, and their impact on Italian society is still being felt today.

including his own son Ivo. By 1957 the office of *La Fiamma* had moved to 499 Parramatta Road. In that year, Costanzo started a special Sunday edition, *La Fiamma della Domenica*, which did not prosper (Gilson 36). By 1967, *La Fiamma* had a weekly circulation of 44,000 and it continued to be issued twice a week (Wednesdays and Saturdays). In the period 1963-1971, Fr Atanasio Gonelli, who assisted Fr Anastasio with the newspaper from the time of his arrival in Sydney in January 1950, also as editor of the religious page, was director of the newspaper.

From the late 1960s, under Costanzo's editorship, the newspaper began to identify with the Australian Labor Party and continued to be vocal in issues affecting immigrants. As Rando observes, the 1972 petition of 72,000 signatures, sponsored by *La Fiamma* to urge the transferability of Australian pensions to Italy, was part of a history of involvement of the newspaper in social issues. In fact, *La Fiamma* also had a long tradition of fund-raising among its readers to support disaster relief in Italy, reportedly collecting over \$300,000 over the years 1947-1967. On the Australian scene, for example, the newspaper responded to the 1953-1954 crisis of the assisted immigrants at Bonegilla migrant camp. Its journalists, especially in the early years, were frequently approached by members of the Italian community in need of help: 'journalists often found themselves acting in a referral role, sometimes as interpreters' (Rando 207).

Advice and support for readers was an integral part of the newspaper's brief. Mrs Lena Gustin was a columnist for *La Fiamma* (1957-1964), using the pseudonym Grazia, dealing with daily issues of settlement. Mrs Enoe Di Stefano, as Gianna, was involved in writing 'L'angolo di Gianna', a section dedicated to a different theme each week, which also answered letters from both male and female readers. Mrs Di Stefano has reported that women commonly expressed a desire to return to Italy, since they found their new life isolating and difficult and they missed family in Italy. Those who lived on farms sometimes took to drink to relieve their loneliness. Single men experienced similar feelings. Cultural and language differences were a source of tension in the wider society. The view that Italians commonly carried knives was well entrenched in the community. Fights often occurred between Italians and non-Italians at work sites where the

language barrier caused communication problems. Workplace accidents were also the result of language and communication problems.



*Vito Nigro, from Melbourne, was the winner of a return trip to Italy, awarded jointly by the shipping company Flotta Lauro and La Fiamma newspaper, c1959.*

In November 1969, *La Fiamma* was sold by the Capuchins, and it eventually passed into the control of Costanzo. Costanzo remained director and proprietor for around five years until 1974. A crisis befell the newspaper in the period 1975-1977 when it appeared that it would fold. This was averted by the sale in May 1978 to the company connected with the Italian language newspaper *Il Globo*, in its 1959 origins associated with Melbourne and Victoria. In 1994, the proprietors of *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma* added to their holdings the Italian language radio network, Rete Italia. In 1997 *La Fiamma* moved to new premises at 92-94 Norton Street, Leichhardt where Rete Italia also has its Sydney offices.

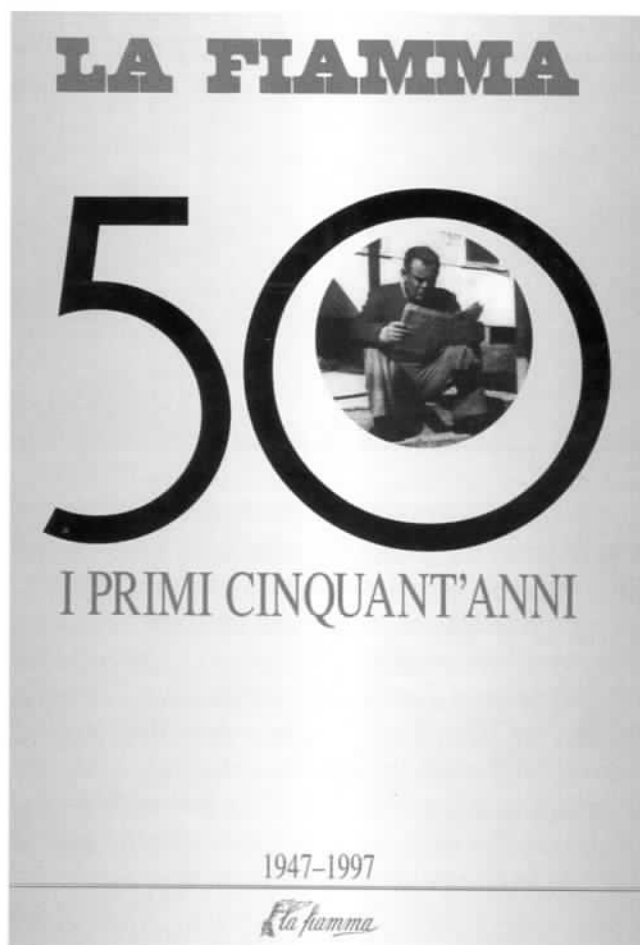
*La Fiamma* has had over many years an authentic and important connection with the Italian-born community of Sydney and beyond. For more than

fifty years, *La Fiamma* has played important roles in Italian language and culture maintenance, transmission of news from Italy and the provision of information in areas which mainstream print media did not address. Davino Zadro, Evasio Costanzo, Pino Bosi, Giuliano Montagna, Rosa Rossi, and Armando Tornari are just some of the journalistic and editorial staff who have over time made a major contribution to *La Fiamma*.

In content, the newspaper has undergone many changes of focus. The front page of the first issue of *La Fiamma* in 1947 had a strong religious flavour, with a message about the Resurrection and news of papal politics in Italy, relating to the renewal of the Lateran Pacts, as well as two short columns in English. The use of English in the newspaper from its inception was directed at overcoming the language barrier for newly arrived immigrants. The newspaper in fact carried sections devoted to the learning of English. The purpose of using English shifted when, from the early 1980s, a distinct section directed at the second generation was introduced into the newspaper.

Front pages of the first decade of *La Fiamma* cover such topics as the Australian Government policy on immigration, the 1951 accord between Italy and Australia over assisted immigration, problems of emigration and settlement, problems and inconsistencies of the assisted migration scheme, and institutional racism and discrimination. Gilson records some interesting data on a range of broad categories (and their relative proportions) covered in *La Fiamma* over the period 1956-1959. Australian affairs ranked almost equal in column space with news from Italy and news related to migrant group activity in Australia (Gilson 56-57). In the 1960s, topics and events covered on front pages included the riots at the Bonegilla migrant hostel, the Italian Prime Minister Leone's campaign about the economic revitalisation of Southern Italy, urging Italians to return to Italy, the need for the children of immigrants to maintain or learn their mother tongue, and the widening of sponsorship rules to facilitate emigration of extended family members and friends.

At the time of writing, *La Fiamma* is published in three issues per week, and it covers both Australian and Italian news, including a regular section in English aimed at the second and third generations. *La Fiamma* is an essential part of a thriving Italian language media in Australia. It must be remembered that in 1996 Italian was



*La Fiamma* newspaper: cover of the anniversary issue celebrating the first fifty years of its publication. This issue included a selection of many important front pages of the newspaper.

reportedly the most widely spoken language in the domestic sphere in Australia after English. More than fifty years on *La Fiamma*, with formalised transnational links, is a significant part the national media structure.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Gaetano Rando provides a very interesting account of this newspaper which ceased publication in 1956 in his article 'Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885 – 1985 in *Italians in Australia. Historical and Social Perspectives*. Wollongong: Department of Modern Languages, University of Wollongong, 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> *La Fiamma*, special supplement, *La Fiamma 1947-1967*, 29 July 1967, p. 10.
- <sup>3</sup> 'I miei vent'anni a 'La Fiamma'', special supplement, *La Fiamma 1947-1967*, 29 July 1967, pp. 10-11.