

Commentary text

Disc B (CULTURE)

Who participates? Identifying diversity

The Media

The Ethnic Press

The news in your own language - [La Fiamma](#)

The Italian language newspaper [La Fiamma](#) established in 1947

Many communities retained their languages and community ties to religious and social groups after immigration. Over 87% of Italian Australian households speak Italian (ABS 1991 Census in [Italian born Community Profile](#), Bureau of Immigration Research). The success of the two biggest Italian newspapers in Australia is testament to the need for community links through language and culture.

The first Italian language newspaper published in Australia - [L'Italo-Australiano](#) - was launched on 12 January 1885 and its concern was to focus on the interests of Italian immigrants and workers, as well as provide a cultural focus for Italians in Australia.

After the Second World War, Italian language newspapers began to flourish and have wide distribution in Australia.

The best known of the post-1945 Italian publications are the national newspapers [La Fiamma](#) (first published in 1947) from Sydney and [Il Globo](#) (first published in 1960) from Melbourne.

[La Fiamma](#) was the most successful of the papers promoted by the Catholic Church. Its first issue on 15 April 1947 was launched by Father Guiseppe La Rosa aided by Davino

Zadro who, recently returned from an internment camp, began an intensive doorknock campaign to promote the paper.

At a reception given by the Italian community to launch the first edition, Reverend Ryan, an Irish Australian priest, said:

You Italians are here in a land... where there are elements whose attitude towards you is largely determined by racial and religious prejudices based simply on ignorance: ignorance of history and ignorance of Catholicism.

There is no need to be ashamed of being Italian, nor of being Catholic. Your country is the cradle of European civilisation and the richness of its Catholic tradition permeates every aspect of its culture which encompasses the very best of our civilisation. You can therefore make a very important contribution to this country.

A few months after the launch the paper was taken over by the Leichhardt-based Capuchin Fathers, part of an order that had been sending missionaries to Australia since 1883.

From 1951 to 1976 the paper was guided by Evasio Constanzo, who had worked in Turin on the daily [La Stampa](#). Constanzo, a law graduate and qualified journalist, organised the paper along professional lines. The new editor transformed the publication from a religious based paper to a secular one, giving it a political direction and a circulation of 44,000 by the 1960s.

Constanzo was appalled that Italians were still viewed suspiciously in Australia as having fascist views. This made subscribers to the paper afraid to give their address for fear of being listed. After all Italians had been interned in Australia during World War II when they were the enemy in Europe. Constanzo saw the benefits of

political education and self-pride for Italians so that they might assert themselves in the new country.

From 1968 onward La Fiamma began to identify with the Australian Labor Party, since the bulk of Italians were blue-collar workers. After the 1972 election Prime Minister Gough Whitlam sent Constanzo a telegram, in which he wrote "we will never forget the Italians".

The paper began to develop a number of objectives as well as providing focus information. The policies it adopted were the defence of the interests and legitimate rights of Italian immigrants and providing the image of Italy as a modern progressive nation.

Some of the campaigns it adopted included:

- Legal action instigated during 1953-54 on behalf of the Italian community against the Australian Government for the 27,000 immigrants who had come out under contract and were held for long periods of time in Bonegilla and other migrant camps with no work available to them. The campaign was abandoned when the Australian Government set up vast public works schemes where Italian immigrant workers were employed.
- Evasio Constanzo, Father Anastasio Paoletti and Ivo Clagnan, members of the paper, proposed the formation of the APIA club as a social and cultural centre for the Italian community in 1954.
- A campaign for the transferability of pensions overseas was held in 1972. 75,000 signatures were collected for a petition and this was instrumental in the government's decision to approve transferability of pensions overseas.

Today, sections of the paper are still devoted to informing the older generations of the services, including government services, available in the community. Staff are still aware of the needs of Italian people who have little or no competence in the English language.

The paper also caters for first generation Italian readers. It still has a circulation of 28,000 per issue and has an additional section in English for second generation readers. Sports, the TV guide, cronaca nera (crime news) and necrologi (obituaries) are the most popular sections.

Constanzo bought La Fiamma in 1978 and sold it to Il Globo's editor in 1985. In 1994 this consortium launched Rete Italiana, an Italian radio station which transmits 24 hours a day to Sydney, Melbourne and the coastal towns around them.

La Fiamma's success is due to the long-term contributions of Rosa Rossi, Davino Zadro, Giulio Montagna, Armando Tornari and Domenico Morizzi, among others.

Text: abridged from Rando, Gaetano "Aspects of the History of Italian Language Press in Australia 1885-1985" in Rando, Gaetano and Arrighi, Michael (eds) *Italians in Australia: Historical and Social Perspectives*, Wollongong, Department of Modern Languages - University of Wollongong, 1993.