

# ***Salemi v MacKellar* Revisited: Drawing Together the Threads of a Controversial Deportation Case**

**Simone Battiston**

Mr Salemi is a prohibited immigrant and has no fundamental right to remain in Australia. He has long since overstayed his authorised period of entry. He did not fall within the category of persons qualifying for amnesty in 1976 and I have not since been prepared to exercise my discretion in his favour ... He has sought, by appealing to my discretion, by seeking through the High Court to restrain me from applying the law to him, by misrepresenting his activities in Australia to people of goodwill in the community and of left-wing trade unions to sign petitions on his behalf, to restrain me from applying to him the rules that apply to many thousands of other prohibited immigrants.

(Michael MacKellar, Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs)<sup>1</sup>

Between 1976 and 1977, Italian-born journalist and migrant rights campaigner Ignazio Salemi was at the centre of a contentious dispute with the Department of Immigration over his amnesty application. Salemi came to Australia a few years before to help co-ordinate the activities of the Australian branch of the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and their Families (FILEF), a worldwide voluntary organisation supported by the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The FILEF aimed to defend the rights of Italian immigrants and to foster a political and cultural conscience among Italian workers. In June 1975, Salemi failed to gain a second extension of his temporary visa and became a prohibited immigrant. His subsequent application for a permanent permit to stay in Australia under the 1976 immigrant amnesty offered by the Coalition Fraser Government was also rejected, despite satisfying all three amnesty criteria (sound character, no criminal record and good health).

Backed by FILEF, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and other left-wing organisations, Salemi took the matter to court. Three hearings in the High Court to restrain the government from deporting him and to force the minister to abide by the principles of natural justice failed. The controversy of the 'Salemi case', as it has since become known, was reflected in the outcome of an appeal in May 1977 to the full bench of the High Court: the six judges split on the matter. The final judgement was in favour of MacKellar, thanks to the casting vote of the chief justice Sir Garfield Barwick.<sup>2</sup> Salemi appealed as a last resort to the Commonwealth ombudsman, who delivered a report critical of the Department of Immigration's handling of the Salemi file and of the way Salemi was treated.<sup>3</sup> Despite acknowledging the ombudsman's report, MacKellar was adamant that Salemi should leave the country and later issued a deportation order. The opposition spokesman on immigration for the ALP, Ted Innes, accused MacKellar of pursuing a vendetta against Salemi at the behest of a few members of the Italian community who ranked highly in the Liberal Party of Australia (LPA).<sup>4</sup> On 19

October 1977, the federal police arrested Salemi and whisked him out of the country within a matter of hours.

Was Salemi really an opportunistic troublemaker, as argued by the right, or was he a sharp community organiser persecuted for his political creed and activism, as argued by the left? What role did he play in FILEF? Why did his activism so antagonise some affluent members of the Italian-Australian community linked to the LPA? What events led up to his case and what did his case and deportation mean to FILEF? By analysing the historical background and pulling together several threads of this controversial deportation case, this article will shed some new light on the event, as well as provide a further understanding of the role of key Italian-Australian community organisations and their relationships with Australian and Italian political parties in the 1970s.

The historical context in which the Salemi case must be understood is the Australian and Italian-Australian socio-political environment of the early to mid 1970s. Indeed, the actions that preceded this case and, I would argue, even brought it about, started some three years before Salemi's deportation in 1977, even though scholars have commonly skipped over or only cursorily examined this chain of events.<sup>5</sup>

A young partisan during the second world war, a correspondent of the PCI newspaper *L'Unità* in Budapest and Prague in the 1960s, and editor of *Emigrazione*, the journal of FILEF's central office in Rome in the early 1970s, Salemi was an experienced and versatile communist official who advocated for workers' and migrants' rights.<sup>6</sup> He first came to Australia in September 1973, when he was officially invited to attend the inaugural Migrant Workers' Conferences (MWC), which were held in Melbourne in October and in Sydney in November of that year.

The MWC were the first attempt ever to bring ethnic groups together and marked a turning point in the relationship between migrant workers and trade union leadership. The delegates were mainly from non-English-speaking backgrounds and were elected from various workshops around Melbourne; some were shop stewards who had been involved in their particular industries for a long time.<sup>7</sup> In Melbourne, the MWC saw the participation of representatives of fifteen unions, two regional trades and labour councils and the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC).<sup>8</sup> Just a few months before the MWC, migrant militants had defied union officials, which caused clashes at the gates when the union declared a return to work during the renowned strike at the Ford Broadmeadows vehicle plant; this typified the divergence between migrant workers and trade union leadership.<sup>9</sup> The growing tension, which had erupted in violence on the part of migrants from within the Australian trade union movement, was articulated at the conferences in a set of proposals for union action and support.<sup>10</sup>

The FILEF branches in Melbourne and Sydney were actively involved in the organising committees of the first MWC and were to become vocal grass-roots organisations in the emerging ethnic rights movement.<sup>11</sup> FILEF activists such as Joe Caputo and Franco Schiavoni attended a series of pioneering seminars organised by the Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre (FEC) in early 1973, which imparted to its participants the concept that 'migrant rights had to be claimed by migrants,

on their own behalf, instead of depending on the paternalism of the Australian community'.<sup>12</sup>

The new political environment brought about by the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s had paved the way, among other things, for the development of movements advocating ethnic consciousness and ethnic rights. These movements resulted in the establishment of migrant lobby groups, welfare-oriented organisations such as the FEC, renamed Centre for Urban Research and Action (CURA) in 1975, and the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC).<sup>13</sup> The FEC and the EMC formed the vanguard of the ethnic rights movement.<sup>14</sup> Both groups embraced the Labor Government's manifesto on promoting equal opportunity for all parts of society, from welfare to politics, and encouraged migrants to lobby the political and welfare establishment. For the first time, migrants felt confident enough to claim rights and social services long denied to them, and request changes to those services that were ill conceived and delivered. Interpreting services were introduced, and enquiries were carried out to identify and investigate issues such as poverty and the teaching of migrant languages. Australian institutions in education, health, welfare, industry, law, trade unions and political parties began to respond actively in varying degrees to the large migrant presence.<sup>15</sup>

As an attendee of the MWC, Salemi took careful note of his impressions. He noted that at the Melbourne conference 'a proper participation of the immigrants, regularly delegated from factories and communities, and a wide participation in the debate that came from below' was evident.<sup>16</sup> However, his comment on the Sydney conference stressed that it was nonetheless about, not for, emigration, 'with papers and speeches from above and a scanty participation from the real world of emigration'.<sup>17</sup> Salemi's note on the conferences was not addressed to FILEF Rome but to the emigration office of the PCI in Rome, with which FILEF had close ties.

Salemi was the third PCI official to visit Australia since 1971. His party 'mission' was to observe and report on the conditions of Italian migrants in Australia, as did the PCI official and *L'Unità* journalist Diego Novelli in August 1971, and the head of the PCI emigration office Giuliano Pajetta in April 1973.<sup>18</sup> Unlike his predecessors, Salemi was the kind of person whom the Italian-Australian left and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) had been seeking for some time: a qualified communist official within the Italian-Australian community able to develop the *attività di massa* (literally, mass activities — people-based social, welfare, and cultural activities run for and by migrants) on an 'Australian' scale. Both the Italian-Australian left and the CPA had their own reasons for wanting a communist cadre from Italy in Australia.

In 1971, cells of the PCI started to form within the Italian communities of Melbourne, Sydney, Wollongong and Adelaide.<sup>19</sup> Italian communist members of the CPA who were fed up with splits and divisions inside the party decided to join the 'Australian' PCI.<sup>20</sup> Novelli's visit was instrumental in this. His presence prompted the establishment of the independent PCI federation (IPCIF), an embryonic network of cells with the potential to become a well-structured federation, similar to those existing in Switzerland and Germany. There were potentially thousands of PCI members among Italian migrants in Australia. By

1973, however, the IPCIF was still unable to set in motion any activity. Correspondence between Italy and Australia reveals that between 1972 and 1973 the IPCIF was bogged down in ideological rows, personal disputes and organisational problems.<sup>21</sup> The IPCIF was meant to collaborate with the CPA in a string of initiatives: the publishing of a newspaper, the establishment of a PCI training school for cadres, even the setting up of a PCI-affiliated Italtourist travel agency.<sup>22</sup>

The CPA believed the problem came from the upper ranks of the IPCIF. In a letter to Giuliano Pajetta, CPA secretary Laurie Aarons commented:

the majority of these leaders live in the past. They are not able to detect the changes, and they are authoritative towards their comrades, particularly the young recently arrived ones, many of whom were sponsored through our party.<sup>23</sup>

The PCI set up by the Italian migrants was 'viewed with great nostalgia', and did not reflect the changes 'within the PCI which went from a fairly hard lined pro-Soviet party of the 1950s to the independent Euro-communism party of the 1970s'.<sup>24</sup>

From the mid-1960s, the CPA began to focus on the PCI model in terms of both ideological content and organisation. To the CPA, the PCI's *via italiana al socialismo* (Italian road to socialism; that is, to bring about socialism by accepting the principle of party pluralism and the renunciation of any non-democratic means of political control) was appealing. To assure themselves that the PCI 'formula' was a winning one, the CPA had only to look at the soaring PCI membership numbers. With some one and a half million members, they were the largest in the west. Similarly, this political positioning was expressed in electoral voting patterns: at the 1963 political elections in Italy, the PCI gathered one-quarter of the total votes, and at the 1972 local elections one-third of the total votes.<sup>25</sup>

The CPA was eager both to recruit members within the large Italian-Australian working class and to enlarge its membership of little more than three thousand. It viewed the link with the IPCIF as a bridge with Italians in Australia, but the difficulties encountered with the IPCIF's executive committee did not let the CPA tap into this potential. The head of the PCI emigration office, Giuliano Pajetta, came to the conclusion that in order to facilitate the re-launch of the PCI in Australia and maintain good relations with the CPA, the PCI was to send one of its cadre, Salemi, to Australia as a representative.

With an invitation in 1973 to attend the first MWC, Salemi spent a total of six weeks in Australia. Besides attending the conferences, he met with local communist and labour officials, trade unionists and Italian migrant workers in factories and on building sites.<sup>26</sup> In Melbourne, in particular, he saw broad participation of Australian communists in the political and trade union sectors, including the local city councils, 'often supporting the initiatives of the Italian comrades that present themselves under the FILEF banner'.<sup>27</sup> He also witnessed signs of an emerging Italian-Australian left in the involvement of FILEF in the MWC's committees, the petition against the closure of the last two sea lines between Italy and Australia, and the meetings organised on the debate regarding the international migrants' charter proposed by FILEF Rome. In his opinion, these commitments were positively diverting the Italian communists from 'sterile disputes between filo-Sovietism, filo-Maoism, [and] Trotskyism'.<sup>28</sup>

Salemi made a positive impression among left-wing Italian-Australians. According to former FILEF activist Joe Caputo, he was what FILEF and the PCI in Australia needed at the time, an activist with 'great intellectual capacity combined with excellent organisational skills'.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, FILEF Melbourne asked its central office and the PCI in Rome to entrust Salemi with the task of helping coordinate FILEF activities in Australia.

Salemi returned to Australia in March 1974 as a FILEF official. He collaborated closely with the secretary of FILEF Melbourne, Giovanni Sgrò, an Italian-born painter and labour activist who in 1979 became the first ever Italian-born candidate elected to the Victorian Parliament. Sgrò emigrated to Australia from a Calabrian village in 1952. His political militancy began as soon as he arrived in Australia. In June 1952, when riots sparked at the Bonegilla migrant hostel, Sgrò was one of the leading protesters. In 1954 he joined the CPA, and later the Coburg branch of the ALP, of which he eventually became president. In the ALP and the trade union movement, he became well known 'as a passionate and tireless campaigner on issues like the opposition to the Vietnam War' and 'for his advocacy of migrant workers' rights'.<sup>30</sup> In 1972, along with other left-wing and communist Italians, Sgrò was pivotal in establishing the first Australian branch of FILEF in Melbourne.

The arrival of Salemi galvanised FILEF activists into action on various fronts: ethnic media, social surveying, and education, to name only a few. On May Day 1974, FILEF launched its biweekly, partly bilingual *Nuovo Paese*, thanks to the initial support of five Australian trade unions that bought the paper in bulk for their Italian-language members. Easily 'mistaken for one of the many combative and workerist papers that emerged in Italy after the 1968 student movement',<sup>31</sup> *Nuovo Paese* was an effective means of broadcasting FILEF's activities and initiatives, as well as left-wing political thinking. In years to come, *Nuovo Paese* played a significant role in the Italian-Australian press through its strong focus on advocating the migrants' cause, through its portrayal of a rather controversial image of the migrants' life in Australia, and through its attempt to raise the cultural level of the community by promoting engagement with contemporary cultural products from Italy.

FILEF's activities expanded throughout 1974. In conjunction with the FEC, FILEF carried out a social survey among four hundred Italian families residing in the Coburg-Brunswick area.<sup>32</sup> It co-organised the first Migrant Education Action Conference, and successfully received a federal grant of \$10,000 under the Welfare Rights Officer Program.<sup>33</sup> FILEF's activities alarmed some conservative officials. The powerful members of the Italian-Australian community, typically businessmen with close links to the conservative Catholic church quarters, felt their influence threatened. The perceived threat came specifically from FILEF, which demanded greater participation of working-class Italians in community institutions and greater involvement in decision-making processes regarding Italian-Australian affairs.

The establishment of a FILEF welfare office and the launch of *Nuovo Paese* exerted pressure on some well-established institutions within the Italian-Australian community in Melbourne, notably the welfare agency Italian Association of Assistance (COASIT) and the conservative newspaper *Il Globo*.

Until the early 1970s, COASIT was the Italian welfare voice, the response of the local Italian-Australian establishment, and Italian and Australian Governments to the welfare needs of Italian migrants.<sup>34</sup> Established in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton on the occasion of the visit of Italian President Giuseppe Saragat in 1967, COASIT was 'a successor to a long provision of assistance and philanthropy provided by middle-class Italians to their compatriots'.<sup>35</sup> COASIT co-founder Elda Vaccari,<sup>36</sup> who for years headed a volunteer welfare service for Italians, became COASIT's first president and co-ordinator of the organisation's social workers and volunteers.<sup>37</sup> Successful in securing Italian and Australian government funds, COASIT was the first ethnic welfare organisation in Australia to employ a qualified social worker through a grant-in-aid in 1968.<sup>38</sup>

The establishment of a FILEF branch in Melbourne in 1972, which FEC activists Arthur Faulkner and Des Storer saw as a counter-balance to the right-wing and conservative COASIT, created a vibrant left-wing base from which not only pressure-group activity could be mounted, but also through which welfare services could be provided.<sup>39</sup> The allocation to FILEF of a grant from the abovementioned federal Welfare Rights Officer Program to employ one of its activists, Cathy Angelone, as welfare officer in 1974 created 'a major crisis' for COASIT.<sup>40</sup>

According to Italian-Australian historian Gianfranco Cresciani, FILEF's activities in Australia aimed to jolt the political consciousness of Italian migrants into 'a more advanced stage of political awareness'.<sup>41</sup> An example of this was the pressure FILEF exerted on the Italian consulate of Melbourne to abide by the 1967 Italian legislation. This legislation aimed at reforming Italian consulates around the world, allowing a greater level of participation of local Italian migrants by means of consultative committees for the administration of migrant affairs, and concerning the funding by the Italian Government of education and welfare activities. FILEF's pressure 'created some lively polemics' within the community and 'quickly attracted rabid opposition from Italian and Australian conservative quarters'.<sup>42</sup>

The Italian-Australian community was stirred up even more by the publication of the findings of the social survey FILEF and the FEC carried out in 1974 in *Nuovo Paese* early in 1975. The findings attacked the common belief of the good or above-average conditions of Italian migrants in 'Australia' (that is, in the Coburg-Brunswick area), claiming that they were overall economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged and discriminated against, compared to the rest of the Australian population. These findings were then tabled in Italy at the First World Conference on Italian Immigration, held in Rome in February 1975 and sponsored by the Italian Foreign Office. Needless to say, this infuriated *Il Globo* and the Italian-Australian conservatives.<sup>43</sup>

The LPA was not sympathetic to FILEF's militant way of instigating reform or to the change it brought about or to FILEF's communist connections. In April 1975 Michael MacKellar, then opposition spokesman on immigration, expressed his loathing for the FILEF-PCI connection during a meeting with George Papadopoulos and Spiro Moraitis of the Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS), a migrant organisation similar to FILEF but which had established a rapport with both major political parties.<sup>44</sup> Moraitis noted in his journal:

MacKellar ... will attack FILEF because one of the FILEF social workers publicly stated (to an Italian audience) that FILEF was committed to the Communist Party!! Very wrong for a voluntary agency to attach itself to a political party.<sup>45</sup>

On Saturday 26 April 1975, the *Age* published a front-page article by Vincent Basile, entitled 'Italian Communists Move In'.<sup>46</sup> The article claimed that FILEF was sponsored by a powerful communist Italian trade union and was attempting to gain an 'all-out bid for political and social control of Melbourne's 250,000-strong Italian community'.<sup>47</sup> These sensational allegations were presented during a period that coincided at an international level with the final phase of the Vietnam war.

In this edition of the *Age*, a large, centrally positioned photo showed Salemi in front of the FILEF office in a defiant pose. About Salemi, Basile wrote:

Heading two full-time workers and scores of volunteers at FILEF is Ignazio Salemi, 43, an Italian Communist Party activist who, before coming to Australia, had worked with Italian migrants in Switzerland, France, Germany and Canada ... Mr Salemi, who calls himself a sociologist and correspondent of the official organ of the Italian Communist Party, 'L'Unità', is employed by headquarters of FILEF, in Rome. In Melbourne he works at FILEF's headquarters in an old house in Munro Street, Coburg.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the headlines, the article was not particularly anti-communist, as it spelled out some of FILEF's activities, yet it provoked a public scandal for the allegations it contained. An embarrassed Giovanni Sgrò was forced to make mainstream media appearances 'to contain the damage caused by the sensationalisation of FILEF's communist connection'.<sup>49</sup> Sgrò suspected that the Associazione Liberale Italiana (Italian Liberal Association), a small but powerful group of Italian businessmen formed early in 1975 and backed by the LPA, was behind the movement to discredit FILEF.<sup>50</sup>

The *Age* allegations stirred up anti-communist hysteria. In the weeks following the publication of the *Age* article, one Mrs McCollum organised anti-communist marches along the streets of Coburg, while on the night of 13 May 1975 an arsonist attempted to burn down the FILEF office of Coburg, partially damaging the editorial office of *Nuovo Paese*.<sup>51</sup>

In January 1976, Michael MacKellar, as immigration minister, offered an amnesty for prohibited immigrants who had overstayed as visitors past 31 December 1975; the amnesty was the fulfilment of a specific electoral promise made by the Liberals during the December 1975 election campaign. Encouraged by Ted Innes, Salemi took advantage of the amnesty and applied. His application was rejected on the ground that, as an overstayed temporary resident, he was not within the category of overstayed visitors to whom the amnesty offer was extended. According to Innes, Salemi, who took the matter to the High Court, was unfairly refused amnesty 'on extremely technical grounds'.<sup>52</sup>

Innes's stance epitomises the solidarity displayed toward Salemi by those members of the sections of the Australian left that were close to FILEF, who believed that the true reason behind the Department of Immigration's refusal was Salemi's communist background and activities as FILEF spokesman. As the court case unfolded, the CURA and the EMC — as well as ethnic community groups, trade unions, local councils, civil liberties groups and left-wing parties — began a

campaign to keep Salemi in Australia, for what they viewed was a matter of principle and an opportunity to criticise the immigration policy of the government.<sup>53</sup>

FILEF placed itself at the forefront of the campaign, launched a defence fund to carry out and finance all aspects of the legal case, and started to circulate petitions, collecting several thousand signatures. Prominent leaders of the Australian left joined the protest, including then-President of the Australian Council of the Trade Unions (ACTU) Bob Hawke, opposition leader Gough Whitlam, and then-Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Reverend Peter Hollingworth. The ALP mobilised the council's best lawyers, Peter Redlich, president of the Victorian ALP, and Clyde Holding, Labor leader in the Victorian Parliament. Several federal and State MPs offered their support, including Gordon Bryant, Jim Simmonds, Tom Roper and Jack Ginifer.<sup>54</sup>

Astonished by the overwhelming support offered to Salemi and allowing him to defend his case in court, MacKellar delayed the pending deportation for months. The case began in April 1976 and continued well into 1977. The May 1977 hearing at the full bench of the High Court was nevertheless a turning point in favour of MacKellar. It was ruled that the minister was not bound to give Salemi:

an opportunity to be heard on such questions as whether he was of good character and normal health and was otherwise within the class described in the news releases, and whether or not he ought to be deported.<sup>55</sup>

MacKellar was entitled to exercise his power to deport him. This was also the finding when the Commonwealth ombudsman was asked to look into the matter.

Once MacKellar signed the deportation order, support for Salemi grew even further. Salemi went underground to avoid arrest. Left-wing church ministers provided support and shelter for him, while Bob Hawke pledged the support of trade unions to prevent Salemi's deportation.<sup>56</sup> Salemi's arrest and deportation took everyone by surprise, press included, although it did not spark off any 'union moves'. Strong protests, such as those of the Victorian branch of the Vehicle Builders' Employees' Federation (VBEF) and Jim Simmonds, channelled the dissent against the government action. The deportation represented 'not merely the final act in a long travesty of justice, but also part of an orchestrated attack on all organisations fighting for migrant rights in Australia'.<sup>57</sup> It provided further evidence that the government 'was moving, step by step, closer to establishing something akin to a dictatorship ... a step towards the tactic of the knock on the door in the middle of the night'.<sup>58</sup>

The Salemi case put pressure on FILEF. The rising political career of Giovanni Sgrò and even the PCI's position in the relationship between Italy and Australia were potentially at stake. Publicly, FILEF stood firmly behind Salemi throughout his court case. Some sources, however, suggest that in the last months of his court case, Salemi was losing the backing of some FILEF members, especially that of his peers and the older generation. There were manifold reasons for this. According to FILEF and PCI activist Franco Lugarini, the Salemi case compromised the relationship between Australia and Italy in terms of the issuing of entry permits to Italian communist officials to come and visit Italian migrants in Australia.<sup>59</sup> For Lugarini, the Salemi case was a source of embarrassment for



the PCI, which at that time was engineering the *compromesso storico* ('historic compromise') with the ruling Christian Democratic Party (DC).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Salemi's dynamic persona (charismatic and appealing to young FILEF activists) seems to have been ill-suited to the older generation. Frictions emerged, especially between Salemi and FILEF's secretary Sgrò; frictions that were probably initiated at the time of the 'Italian communists move in' incident of 1975. Sgrò admitted to Lopez that he strongly disapproved of Salemi's activism and did not have second thoughts about whether he should have gone back to Italy:

Salemi got too big [for his] boots, too big for himself. He used to ... go on radio, or whatever, and write anything without consulting the bloody FILEF Committee; and I said to FILEF in Rome, he must go.<sup>61</sup>

During the court case, there were palpable signs of tension between Sgrò and Salemi, exemplified in a letter to MacKellar dated 25 May 1977. MacKellar quoted Sgrò's letter during a grievance debate in Parliament to back his argument that neither Salemi nor FILEF intended to benefit genuinely from the amnesty offer but had only filed a request at the instigation of Ted Innes:

MacKELLAR: I shall quote from a letter dated 25 May 1977 which I received from Mr Giovanni Sgrò, the secretary of ... FILEF. The letter in part states:

*But I felt that we had to defend Mr Salemi's right ...*

INNES: You are talking about a different interview.

MacKELLAR: The honourable member should listen to the letter. It states:

*But I felt that we had to defend Mr Salemi's right to stay in Australia — and it is not so much Mr Salemi who wants to stay here ...*

Mr Sgrò goes on to say in a later paragraph:

*I bring to your attention the fact that Mr Salemi does not intend to remain in Australia permanently ...*

Later on he said:

*I feel that it is within your power and scope to allow Mr. Salemi to stay here for another twelve to fifteen months at least, and I can assure you that if we could find a replacement for him, he would leave long before then.*<sup>62</sup>

Two months earlier (in March 1977) Sgrò won a pre-selection bid for the safe State Labor seat of the Legislative Council's Melbourne North province. Salemi's case, and his pending deportation, could potentially boomerang on Sgrò's rising political career. The pro-Salemi campaign began to appear, in Sgrò's eyes, to be politically counter-productive.

Salemi's past political activism was at times quite pugnacious. During the 1948 riots that followed the attempted assassination of the PCI's secretary Palmiro Togliatti, Salemi was arrested and jailed for forming a roadblock.<sup>63</sup> In 1969, he was expelled from Czechoslovakia when he tried to save an anti-occupation demonstrator from an army squad during the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion.<sup>64</sup> If Salemi's daring activism was seen by some as a sign of his vibrant personality, it also alienated some of the old activists, such as Vincenzo Mammoliti and Emilio Deleidi, who thought that Salemi's presence was a

'mistake' in Australia, as it strengthened the radical elements in FILEF more than the moderate ones could ever have done.<sup>65</sup>

Salemi's deportation, however, 'heralded the breakdown of the alliance between the new activists Salemi built around him, and the old working class activists'.<sup>66</sup> The failure of the court case symbolised the defeat of FILEF's vanguard elements. The new breed of young FILEF activists, such as Joe Caputo, Umberto Martinengo and Stefano De Pieri, soon found it difficult to find a place for themselves in FILEF without Salemi, and they gradually abandoned the organisation. Salemi was the linchpin for the Italian-Australian left in the mid-1970s and proved to be instrumental in the fortunes of FILEF. The Italian-Australian conservatives gravitating toward well-known community institutions such as *Il Globo* and COASIT, as well as political parties such as the LPA, had perceived FILEF's growing role as a threat and acted accordingly.

Salemi's communist background became the pretext to discredit FILEF and its action in the eyes of Australian public opinion still susceptible to a 'red scare'. Following a change of government in 1975, FILEF suffered setbacks, including cuts in federal funding and the deportation of Salemi in 1977. A figure such as Salemi was sought-after by Italian and Australian communists alike in the early 1970s and was deemed to be instrumental in mobilising the 'masses'. Salemi was also a visible activist who was willing, and able, to create a following around him, as well as attract media attention. His presence sparked a set of controversies in and out of FILEF, and acts as a telling example of the type of political manoeuvring that existed within the Italian-Australian community in the 1970s.

**Salemi v MacKellar Revisited: Drawing Together the Threads of a Controversial Deportation Case**

**Simone Battiston**

Thanks to Giovanni Sgro in Melbourne and to the Antonio Gramsci Foundation in Rome for kindly providing access to the FILEF archive and to the PCI files, respectively. Particular thanks are also due to those former FILEF and PCI members who have kindly provided recollections of their own past political activism.

- 1 House of Representatives, 'Grievance Debate', 8 August 1977, *Hansard*, p 898.
- 2 *Salemi v Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, MacKellar* (No 2) (1977) 137 CLR 396; Simone Battiston, 'Activist's Court Case Disputed Fair-go Policy', *Age*, 13 April 2004, p 12.
- 3 'Canberra Attacked on Salemi Decision', *Age*, 24 August 1977, p 4.
- 4 House of Representatives, *op. cit.*, p 889.
- 5 See, for instance, Andrew Jakubowicz, Michael Morrissey and Joanne Palser, *Ethnicity, Class and Social Policy in Australia*, University of New South Wales, Kensington, NSW, 1984, p 63; Constance Lever-Tracy and Michael Quinlan, *A Divided Working Class: Ethnic Segmentation and Industrial Conflict in Australia*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London-New York, 1988, pp 155–6; Mark Lopez, *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics: 1945–75*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Vic, 2000, pp 328, 403–4.
- 6 Battiston, *op. cit.*
- 7 Morag Loh, *With Courage in their Cases: The Experiences of Thirty-five Italian Immigrant Workers and their Families in Australia*, FILEF, Melbourne, 1980, p 103.
- 8 Lopez, *op. cit.*, p 289.
- 9 Loh, *op. cit.*, p 105.
- 10 Jean Martin, *The Migrant Presence, Australian Responses, 1947–77: Research Report for the National Population Inquiry*, Allen & Unwin, Hornsby, NSW, 1978, p 200.
- 11 Vera Zaccari and FILEF Sydney, *Italian Migrant Women and Australian Trade Unions*, Clearing House on Migration Issues, paper no 56, Richmond, Vic, 1986, p 2.
- 12 Carlo Carli, 'From Ethnic Rights to the Galbally Report — The Politics of Multiculturalism and the Melbourne Italian Community', Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1982, p 25; Martin, *op. cit.*, p 196.
- 13 Michele Langfield, *Espresso Bar to EMC: a Thirty-year History of the Ecumenical Migration Centre*, Monash Publications in History no 22, Clayton, Vic, 1996, p xii.
- 14 Lopez, *op. cit.*, pp 131–55.
- 15 Martin, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- 16 Ignazio Salemi, 'Nota sul Viaggio in Australia, 30 Settembre – 15 Novembre 1973', Antonio Gramsci Foundation (AGF), Rome, Italian Communist Party (PCI) Collection, busta 4121, fogli 731–34.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 Diego Novelli, 'Nota per Ufficio di Segreteria (Pecchioli) — Viaggio in Australia', 6 September 1971, AGF-PCI Collection, busta 4141, fogli 118–23; Giuliano Pajetta, 'Informazione sul Soggiorno in Australia, 14 Aprile – 1 Maggio 1973', AGF-PCI Collection, busta 4105, fogli 217–24; Diego Novelli, 'I Sindacati in Australia', *L'Unità*, 16 November 1971; Diego Novelli, 'Sedici Ore di Lavoro Ogni Giorno nel Deserto', *L'Unità*, October 1971; 'A Colloquio con Diego Novelli, Vedovo del PCI', *Nuovo Paese*, October 2003, p 4.
- 19 Before Novelli's visit to Australia some hundreds of Italian migrants were already PCI sympathisers or former members before migrating. Some were members of the CPA, the local trade unions, as well as of left-wing migrants associations, such as the Italo-Australian Club of Sydney or the Italo-Australian League of Melbourne.
- 20 Carli, *op. cit.*, pp 21–2.
- 21 Laurie Aarons, 'Letter to Giuliano Pajetta', 10 July 1972, AGF-PCI Collection, busta 4111, foglio 1082; Laurie Aarons, 'Letter to Giuliano Pajetta', February 1973, AGF-PCI Collection, busta 4101, fogli 715–16.
- 22 Novelli, 'Nota per Ufficio di Segreteria (Pecchioli)', *op. cit.*
- 23 Laurie Aarons, 'Lettera a Giuliano Pajetta', 27 March 1973, AGF-PCI Collection, busta 4105, fogli 211–12.

- 24 Carli, op. cit., p 22.
- 25 Aldo Agosti, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1999, pp 91, 106.
- 26 Salemi, 'Nota sul Viaggio in Australia', op. cit.
- 27 ibid.
- 28 ibid.
- 29 Joe Caputo, Interview with author, 2003, Brunswick, Vic (full transcription in possession of author).
- 30 Lopez, op. cit., p 148.
- 31 Carli, op. cit., p 27.
- 32 'Gli Italiani in Australia', *Nuovo Paese*, 2 February 1975, twelve-page insert; see also Des Storer, 'Italians in Australia: a Social Overview' in Philip de Lacey and Millicent Poole (eds), *Mosaic or Melting Pot: Cultural Evolution in Australia*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, 1979, pp 289–308.
- 33 Rosemary Sandford, 'The Victorian Welfare Rights Project' in Victorian Council of Social Service, (VCSS), *We've Got No Choice: a Welfare Rights Perspective*, VCSS, Collingwood, Vic, 1977, p 2.
- 34 Jakubowicz, Morrissey and Palser, op. cit., p 62; Caroline Alcorso, Cesare Giulio Popoli and Gaetano Rando, 'Community Networks and Institutions' in Stephen Castles, Caroline Alcorso, Gaetano Rando and Ellie Vasta (eds), *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, NSW, 1992, p 107.
- 35 Carli, op. cit., p 20.
- 36 Elda Vaccari was the wife of Gualtiero Vaccari, a prominent Italian-born businessman, government advisor and philanthropist, see Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-fascism, and Italians in Australia 1922–1945*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1980, p 209.
- 37 A Faini, *Breve Storia del COASIT*, COASIT, Carlton, Vic, 1971, p 3.
- 38 Alcorso, Popoli and Rando, op. cit., p 107.
- 39 Lopez, op. cit., p 148–9.
- 40 Jakubowicz, Morrissey and Palser, op. cit., p 62.
- 41 Gianfranco Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates: Italian Life in Australia — Emigranti o Compari: Vita Italiana in Australia*, Knockmore Enterprises, Sydney, 1988, p 281.
- 42 Carli, op. cit., p 37; Cresciani, *Migrants or Mates*, op. cit., p 281.
- 43 Nino Randazzo, 'Italiani d'Australia "Morti di Fame"?'', *Il Globo*, 24 February 1975, p 1; G Wright, 'Bottom of the List or Beautifully Integrated? That's ... the Italian Question', *Herald Sun*, 6 March 1975, pp 36–7.
- 44 Lopez, op. cit., p 404.
- 45 ibid., p 378.
- 46 Vincent Basile, 'Italian Communists Move In', *Age*, 26 April 1975, p 1.
- 47 ibid.
- 48 ibid.
- 49 Lopez, op. cit., pp 403–4.
- 50 'Good Ol' Commie Baiting Discredits Migrant Group', *Melbourne Times*, 7 May 1975, pp 1, 12.
- 51 Cathy Angelone, Interview with author, 2003, Rome, Italy (minidisc/full transcription in possession of author). See also 'Numerosi Attestati di Simpatia per le Nostre Organizzazioni della FILEF', *Nuovo Paese*, 17 May 1975, p 1; 'Fire Was Lit Deliberately, Says FILEF Secretary', *Age*, 15 May 1975, p 5.
- 52 Ted Innes, Press release, 6 August 1976.
- 53 John Halfpenny, 'Letter to Giovanni Sgrò', 11 August 1976, FILEF Melbourne Collection.
- 54 Battiston, op. cit.
- 55 *Salemi v Minister*, op. cit.
- 56 Vincent Basile, 'We will help Salemi, says Hawke', *Age*, 31 August 1977, p 3.
- 57 Walter Blair, acting secretary of the Victorian branch of the VBEF, 'Letter to FILEF', 21 October 1977, FILEF Melbourne Collection.
- 58 Jim Simmonds, 'Statement', 21 October 1977, FILEF Melbourne Collection.
- 59 Franco Lugarini, Interview with author, 2003, Cerveteri, Rome (minidisc/full transcription in possession of author).

- 60 *ibid.* Note that through the *compromesso storico*, the PCI in the opposition was to obtain a more active role and a more sympathetic relationship with the Italian Government.
- 61 Lopez, *op. cit.*, p 403.
- 62 House of Representatives, *op. cit.*, p 900.
- 63 Ignazio Salemi, Interview with author, 2003, Rome, Italy (full transcription in possession of author); see also Battiston, *op. cit.*
- 64 *ibid.*
- 65 Vincenzo Mammoliti, Interview with author, 2002, Bulla, Vic (full transcription in possession of author); Emilio Deleidi, Interview with author, 2002, Fawkner, Vic. (full transcription in possession of author).
- 66 Carli, *op. cit.*, p 51.

**Unfolding Australia's Fan of Memory: Music in Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town***  
**Gay Breyley**

Many thanks to Dr Ruby Langford Ginibi for her support, time and generosity. I am grateful also to the anonymous referees for their comments, Cath Ellis and Adrian Vickers for their thoughts, and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Wollongong for financial assistance.

- 1 Janine Little Nyoongah, 'Talking With Ruby Langford Ginibi', *Approaches to Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Australian Women's Studies Resources. Accessed 28 July 2004. <http://emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/books/ruby/little.htm>.
- 2 Ruby Langford Ginibi and Penny Van Toorn, 'Who's in Whose Canon?: Transforming Aboriginal Writers into Big Guns', *Southerly*, vol 57 no 3, Spring 1997, p 135: 'In the case of Aboriginal texts, I would say that it should be Aboriginal academics and historians who judge whether they're good or not, because when white people review our texts and writings, they are seeing us through their own white images and eyes, even when they praise us'; p 128: 'Ethnocentricity is institutionalised in academic terminology and critical protocols, in categories, frames of theoretical reference, and other discursive practices that automatically ... introduce cultural biases'.
- 3 Marcia Langton, 'Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television ...' *An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things*, Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1993, p 33. (Of course, my declaration here does not resolve the problems identified by Langford Ginibi and others. For further analysis, see Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism', *Borderlands*, vol 3, no 2, 2004.)
- 4 Walter Benjamin, 'Berlin Chronicle' [1932], *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Schocken Books, New York, 1986, p 7.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, Michael W Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (eds), Rodney Livingstone et al. (trans.), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, p 597.
- 6 Blum quotes Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1956, p 1, in Blum, 'Conclusion: Music in an Age of Cultural Confrontation' in Margaret J Kartomi and Stephen Blum (eds), *Music-Cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1994, p 252.
- 7 Blum, 'Conclusion', *Music-Cultures in Contact*, *op. cit.*, p 252 (citing Thomas Turino, 'Structure, Context, and Strategy in Musical Ethnography', *Ethnomusicology*, vol 34, 1990, p 401. Turino cites Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, International Publishers, New York, 1971, p 324).
- 8 In music, to 'resolve' is to progress from a dissonance to a consonance, or to another less violent dissonance.
- 9 Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka: On the tenth anniversary of his death', *Illuminations*, Fontana Press, London, 1992, p 114.
- 10 *ibid.*, pp 114–15, quoting Franz Kafka, 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk'.
- 11 Ruby Langford (Ginibi), *Don't Take Your Love To Town*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, p 261. This first edition was published under the name 'Ruby Langford'.