

Governments, parties, and unions: The politics of emigration

by Michele Colucci

In the years following World War II the question of emigration was frequently addressed and debated in the Italian political and trade union world. Actually all of Italian society was coming to terms with the resuming of mass emigration. So many spoke up on the subject, including entrepreneurs and cooperative members, workers and peasants. The subject was addressed in newspapers and magazines, as well as movies and novels.¹ As regards the positions of the parties and the trade unions, they had been debating the issue for decades. Especially in the time of Giolitti—before,

¹ For an overview, see Michele Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa, 1945-1957*, Donzelli Editore, Roma 2008; Sandro Rinauro, *Il cammino della speranza. L'emigrazione clandestina degli italiani nel secondo dopoguerra*, Einaudi, Torino 2009; Elia Morandi, *Governare l'emigrazione. Lavoratori italiani verso la Germania federale*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 2011; Claudio Besana, *Accordi internazionali ed emigrazione della mano d'opera italiana tra ricostruzione e sviluppo*, in Sergio Zaninelli, Mario Taccolini (eds), *Il lavoro come fattore produttivo e come risorsa nella storia economica italiana*, Edizioni Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2001, pp. 3-17; Corrado Bonifazi, *Dall'emigrazione assistita alla gestione dell'immigrazione: le politiche migratorie nell'Italia repubblicana dai vecchi ai nuovi scenari del fenomeno*, "Popolazione e storia", 2005, 1, pp. 19-43; Vittorio Briani, *La legislazione emigratoria italiana nelle successive fasi*, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1978; Sarah Collinson, *Le migrazioni internazionali e l'Europa: un profilo comparato*, il Mulino, Bologna 1994; Andreina De Clementi, *Il prezzo della ricostruzione. L'emigrazione italiana nel secondo dopoguerra*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010; Vincenzo Grassi, *Le politiche migratorie dei principali paesi dell'Europa occidentale dal secondo dopoguerra agli anni '80*, "Affari sociali internazionali", 1994, 2, pp. 57-80; Mario Marcellini, *Sindacati e problemi dell'emigrazione*, in Franca Assante (ed.), *Il movimento migratorio italiano dall'unità nazionale ai nostri giorni*, v. II, Librairie Droz, Ginevra 1978, pp. 1-21; Rolf Petri, *Dalla ricostruzione al miracolo economico*, in Giovanni Sabbatucci, Vittorio Vidotto (eds), *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 5, *La repubblica*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1997, pp. 313-439; Leonardo Rapone, *L'emigrazione come problema di politica estera. La questione degli italiani in Francia nella crisi dei rapporti italo-francesi, 1938-1947*, "Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica", 1993, 1, pp. 151-95; Patrizia Rontini, *Il governo italiano e il problema dell'emigrazione negli anni '50*, in Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain H. Rainero, Brunello Vigezzi (eds), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1950-60)*, Marzorati, Milano 1992, pp. 521-43; Gianfausto Rosoli, *Politiche sociali e problematiche istituzionali dell'emigrazione italiana dalla fine del secondo conflitto mondiale ad oggi*, in Casimira Grandi (ed.), *Emigrazione. Memorie e realtà*, Provincia autonoma di Trento, Trento 1990; Giovanni Battista Sacchetti, *Cento anni di "politica dell'emigrazione". L'incerta presenza dello Stato di fronte alla realtà migratoria italiana*, in Gianfausto Rosoli (ed.), *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana (1876-1976)*, Cser, Roma 1978, pp. 253-71.

during and after the law of 1901—a sensitivity to and concern with the issue had evolved, reflected in some very elaborate as well as rather advanced studies and proposals for action. This is borne out by a great number of publications, conferences, projects and parliamentary discussions, which continued to be abundant in the immediate aftermath of World War II.²

In brief, there were two main opposite camps: those who were in favor of state control of migratory flows, and those who would rather liberalize them, making them exclusively dependent on market needs. Among the former were the reformist sectors of the workers' movement and a significant part of the Catholic movement. It is significant that two of the major charities active in the field of migration, the Società Umanitaria and the Opera Bonomelli, were outgrowths, respectively, of the Socialist and the Catholic world, and shared the reformist spirit that spread during the Giolittian period. In the other camp we find free-traders, agrarian entrepreneurs and ship owners, with their significant commercial interests. These subjects feared that the interference of institutions could somehow undermine their business. This dichotomy, far from being peculiar to the Giolittian period, was destined to reemerge periodically in the Italian political debate.

With Fascism and the new norms on emigration promulgated from the second half of the 1920s onward, this wealth of discussions and competence started to decline, for two main reasons. On the one hand, there was the authoritarian character of the regime, which impeded free public debate and the liberty of expression and association, on the other, the dissolution of the General Commissariat for Emigration in 1927, along with connected institutions such as the Higher Council of Emigration. In 1901, these institutions had not only acquired institutional jurisdiction in this field, but had also become places for debates on economic, political and social issues connected to emigration.³ Eventually the phenomenon of international

² On this subject, see Dora Marucco, *Il Consiglio superiore dell'emigrazione. Problemi sindacali e sindacalisti nei dibattiti di un quarto di secolo*, in Vanni Blengino, Emilio Franzina, Adolfo Pepe (eds), *La riscoperta dell'America. Lavoratori e sindacato nell'emigrazione italiana in America Latina 1870-1970*, Teti, Milano 1994, pp. 44-61; Fabio Grassi Orsini, *Per una storia del Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione*, "Le carte e la storia", 1997, 1, pp. 112-138; Maria Rosaria Ostuni, *Momenti della "contrastata vita" del Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione*, in Bruno Bezza (ed.), *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi di adozione*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1983, pp. 101-118; Id., *Leggi e politiche di governo nell'Italia liberale e fascista* in Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, Emilio Franzina (eds), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* vol. I, *Partenze*, Donzelli, Roma 2001, pp. 309-19; Michele Colucci, *Sindacato e migrazioni*, in Paola Corti, Matteo Sanfilippo (eds), *Storia d'Italia. Annali 24. Migrazioni*, Einaudi, Torino 2009, pp. 592-607.

³ On this subject, see Annunziata Nobile, *Politica migratoria e vicende dell'emigrazione durante il fascismo*, "Il Ponte", 1974, 11-12 pp. 1322-1341; Ercole Sori, *Emigrazione all'estero e migrazioni interne in Italia tra le due guerre*, "Quaderni storici", 1975, 29-30, pp. 579-606; Anna Treves, *Le migrazioni interne nell'Italia fascista. Politica e realtà demografica*, Einaudi, Torino 1976; Philip W. Cannistraro, Gianfausto Rosoli, *Emigrazione Chiesa e fascismo. Lo scioglimento dell'Opera Bonomelli (1922-1928)*, Studium, Roma 1979; Monte S. Finkelstein,

emigration declined, quantitatively as well as in other ways, as a result first of national states shutting down their frontiers—as in the case of the famous 1924 Quota Act in the USA—then of the crisis of 1929.

1. The positions of parties and unions in the aftermath of the war

At the end of World War II, the institutional apparatus with jurisdiction over migration was divided up between the legacy of the Commissariato per le Migrazioni Interne e la Colonizzazione and the Direzione Generale Italiani all'Estero (General Directory for Italians Abroad) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both Fascist creations. Inevitably, the debate among operators had been at a standstill for years, and had lost all touch with the changes that had occurred on the international labor market in the meantime. After the fall of Fascism, the political world and the trade unions had been forced to hastily reorganize, and were weighed down by years of exile, going underground, splits and reunifications which had inevitably gone to the detriment of reflection on many fronts, including that of migratory policies.

However, as early as World War II many subjects had been addressing the relationship between emigration and reconstruction with insistency and continuity.⁴ In the political debate of the last war years, emigration holds a very special place. It was associated first and foremost with the need to come up with effective actions to fight unemployment. Furthermore, the inflow of capital from immigrants' remittances was regarded as a resource. On the international scene, Italy's emigrant workforce was viewed as the country's potential contribution to the reconstruction of Europe. Social policy, economic policy, and foreign policy: these were the three guidelines that inspired the resuming, shortly thereafter, of an Italian migratory policy.

In his pamphlet *Le idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*, written in 1942, Alcide De Gasperi indicated emigration as a necessary condition and a priority for reconstruction.

To grant all peoples the indispensable conditions for their existence, it is necessary [...] to establish freedom of emigration, disciplined not only by

The Johnson Act, Mussolini and Fascist Emigration Policy: 1921-1930, "Journal of American Ethnic History", 1988, 1, pp. 38-55.

⁴ See Sandro Rinauro, *Prigionieri di guerra ed emigrazione di massa nella politica economica della ricostruzione, 1944-1948. Il caso dei prigionieri italiani della Francia*, "Studi e ricerche di storia contemporanea", 1999, 51, p. 241; Id., *La disoccupazione di massa e il contrastato rimpatrio dei prigionieri di guerra*, "Storia in Lombardia", 1998, 2-3, pp. 591-2.

treaties, but also by international labor law, and to grant every people free access to international travel routes.⁵

In the Socialist camp, in 1943 Ludovico D'Aragona underscored the importance, once the war was over, of reviving emigration, realizing as he did that the offer on the Italian labor market would be excessive while Europe would be starved for labor for its reconstruction. At the same time, D'Aragona recalled the need to protect and safeguard migrant workers.

This emigration cannot be left to its own devices. It is the State's duty to protect it in every possible way. We must be in favor of maximum freedom of movement [...] but emigration [should be] controlled and watched over, as well as protected. Our worker must not go abroad to make wages go down; he must leave knowing that it is his duty to join the trade unions in his working place.⁶

Late in 1944, Ugo La Malfa placed the need for emigration within the framework of continental economic cooperation and the "European solution" to the Southern Question: "Workers will have to move from one country to another. There will be international plans for economic coordination and a new human society that will deal concretely with its main problems."⁷ In March 1945, stockholder Guido Dorso did not hesitate to indicate the resuming of emigration as the inevitable premise for the solution of the Southern Question:

If, thanks to renewed contacts, [...] new capitals will again start to flow in from our emigrants, it will be possible to resume the plan to transform half of

⁵ Alcide De Gasperi, *Le idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*, November 1942. For an analysis of the implications of the document in terms of economic policy, see Giuseppe Barone, *Stato e Mezzogiorno. Il primo tempo dell'intervento straordinario*, in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, diretta da Francesco Barbagallo, vol. I, Einaudi, Torino 1994, p. 293-409; Mario G. Rossi, *La democrazia antifascista nei programmi della Democrazia Cristiana*, "Italia contemporanea", 2005, 239-240, pp. 209-23. References to emigration are also found in other writings by Alcide De Gasperi from the war years: for example, the section *Italia democratica e pacifica* in the *Programma della Democrazia Cristiana*, published in an underground issue of "Il Popolo" on 12 December 1944: Andrea Damilano (ed.), *Atti e documenti della Democrazia Cristiana*, vol. I, Cinque Lune, Roma, 1968, p. 33.

⁶ Vico Lodetti (Ludovico D'Aragona), *Problemi di politica interna ed estera*, Biblioteca Bruno Buozzi, Vigevano 1947, p. 17 (the book is a reprint of an underground document written in 1943).

⁷ La Malfa's contribution is quoted by Lorenzo Mechi, *Fra modernizzazione economica e integrazione europea. L'azione di Ugo La Malfa al Ministero per il commercio con l'estero*, in Ugo De Siervo, Sandro Guerrieri, Antonio Varsori (eds), *La prima legislatura repubblicana. Continuità e discontinuità nell'azione delle istituzioni*, vol. II, Carocci, Roma 2004, p. 56.

the South into a large orchard and of industrializing agriculture, and our country will flourish again after such a long age of misgovernment.⁸

The possibility of a resumption of emigration was also addressed in union milieus.

With the first signs of distension that will follow the end of the war, a migratory flow will arise in Italy, and it needs to be regulated and protected. The CGIL will ask and propose protective measures to guarantee to Italian workers going abroad conditions at least equal to those that French and America would request for their own children in identical situations. In the context of these needs, I find that no responsible leader would want and much less encourage a sporadic emigration, or one by isolated units.⁹

This was in May 1945. Oreste Lizzadri went on by asking himself whether it would not have been preferable for Italian workers to be employed in the reconstruction of Italy. He recognized, however, that their employment abroad would have been strategic because of the question of remittances and Italy's balance of payments. The CGIL specified that it would "bring the contribution of its experience" to a hypothetical general plan addressing the whole question, but that it would be up to "the government in charge to lay out and implement" this plan.¹⁰ The confederation also intended to act on the terrain of workers' training and international negotiation. As early as 1945, Leopoldo Rubinacci declared that a negotiation on the migration of Italian workers was in course with Great Britain and Belgium. Rubinacci once again recommended a preference for the emigration of organized groups, for, he argued, a double purpose: preventing the departure of individuals who would have been useful for the reconstruction of Italy, and favoring the social and union protection of workers abroad by avoiding their isolation.¹¹

Staying with the final phase of the war, it is important to mention the proposals on emigration presented by the CGIL to the Italian government on August 22, 1945. This government was an expression of antifascist forces and included prominent figures in the history of the workers' movement, such as Palmiro Togliatti, Pietro Nenni, Fausto Gullo, Emilio Lussu, and Gaetano Barbareschi.

The union began by defining emigration as a sort of "necessary evil," a definition that broad sectors of the political and social world agreed upon.

⁸ Guido Dorso, *Relazione sulla "Questione meridionale"*, quaderni del Partito d'Azione, Roma, presumed date 1945, pp. 10-11.

⁹ Oreste Lizzadri, *La Confederazione Generale del Lavoro e i lavoratori italiani all'estero*, "Italiani nel mondo", 25 May 1945, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *L'interessamento della Cgil per i problemi dell'emigrazione*, "Italiani nel mondo", 10 July 1945, p. 16.

In principle, the CGIL is against Italian workers being forced to go abroad to find remunerative jobs, right at a time when the reconstruction of the country calls for a joint effort by all Italians, and especially by workers [...]. But it is the CGIL's duty to adhere to reality, however unpleasant this may be, and, while it remains unmoved in its principles, it is concerned with procuring the best possible wage, insurance and environmental conditions, and in general all the other benefits, to our workers going abroad.¹²

The union proposed that emigrants should not leave individually, but should be made to join larger organizations including all the actors in the production process: managers, workers, and union representatives.

The CGIL believes that workers' organizations should be formed including all figures, from the chief executive to the handworker, so as to present foreign demand for labor with organic work units. The CGIL also believes that additional personnel should be attached to these organizations, such as doctors, priests, nurses, cooks, and administrative staff, so that the workers will take with them, insofar as possible, the warmth of their homeland. The CGIL also thinks it is of the highest importance that these workers do not lose contact with their trade unions, and that they feel protected and supported by them throughout the duration of their voluntary exit, from their departure to their return home. The CGIL therefore requests that a fiduciary of the Confederation, chosen among the workers themselves, be included in these workers' units.¹³

Finally, the CGIL recommended that recruiting conditions in Italy and working conditions abroad be carefully monitored to prevent exploitation and prevarication of immigrants, and proposed to play an active role in this regard.

We need to immediately agree that Italian workers will only leave after entering contracts signed here in Italy, with wages and other benefits at least equal to those of white workers in the area where they go to work, and, in any case, never inferior to those in force in Italy. Finally, the CGIL requests that any negotiations for the hiring of workers abroad should not be limited to the governments concerned, but that the involvement of the CGIL should be sought from the beginning, so that it may bring its contribution not only on the issue of wages, but also on all other questions regarding workers' life conditions in general.¹⁴

¹² *Proposte sul problema dell'emigrazione della Confederazione generale del lavoro*, "Italiani nel mondo", 10 September 1945, p. 1.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

As the passages I just quoted show, the debate at the end of the war was already quite lively, and, although there were different positions and interpretations, on the subject of emigration politicians and the unions were essentially in agreement.

The main protagonist of Italian migratory policy was Alcide De Gasperi, who had expressed himself on this subject as early as 1942. In De Gasperi's opinion, emigration had a strategic role in the tortuous process whereby Italy was striving to turn a new page and leave behind the Fascist regime and its wars and find a place in international dialectics between states. In this perspective, emigration was seen essentially as a prime opportunity for the foreign policy of Italy, which needed to reinforce its position in the end-of-the-war negotiations. In De Gasperi's view, Italy had few other resources than its immense reservoir of labor to put on the table in its negotiations with other states. This was a reservoir that needed to be emptied out at all costs, as it was a major threat to social and political stability. Thus, here foreign and domestic politics converged. In De Gasperi's project, however, international considerations apparently prevailed on domestic ones, with different nuances compared to the statements made in the same months and the same years by other politicians, intellectuals and economists, including some Christian Democrat ones. De Gasperi's work to propitiate the resuming of emigration obtained a first concrete result on 22 February 1946, when Italy and France signed an agreement for the emigration of 20,000 Italian miners. This was a prelude to a much more significant agreement on emigration signed on 21 March 1947. Incidentally, the agreement of 1947 was signed when the Left was still part of the government, and indeed Communists and Socialists showed no lack of enthusiasm for this result. The negotiation was invested with political and economic significance: Italian emigration was part of a collaborative effort of the two countries to build democratic and anti-Fascist institution. "We do not limit ourselves to a search for comrades having a generic aptitude for excavation work," wrote Jean Panico, a representative of the GGFT who attended the government negotiations, on the *Unità*:

In France we need hands because we lack labor. In Italy the issue is different: it presently has hundreds of unemployed who need work [...]. By common will of all, the workers of our two countries will rise again from the ruins and built an insurmountable barrier: the friendship and unity of France and Italy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Jean Panico, *La Francia ha bisogno di braccia, l'Italia di lavoro*, "L'Unità", 8 February 1946, p. 1. Panico also wrote in the Italian press in the following years as well: see Id., *La Cgt francese e l'immigrazione italiana*, "Bollettino quindicinale dell'emigrazione", 25 June 1949, pp. 123-4.

The newspaper defined the implementation the Italian-French agreement as “a success of the CGIL.”¹⁶ When Italy and France signed an agreement in March 1947 for the emigration of two hundred thousand Italians, the Communist Croizat declared: “it is with agreements such as the one that will be signed at Palazzo Chigi that ties of friendship between our two countries can be entered into, such as are needed for two peoples like ours, which today are fighting for the same ideals of democracy and liberty.”¹⁷

The new ruling class of the Republic promoted international agreements to resume immigration even before signing the peace treaty on 10 February 1947 with the powers that had won the war. Indeed, the mentioned agreement of 1946 with France and the even more famous one of June 1946 with Belgium preceded even the signing of the treaty of Paris. This shows how urgent the need was to enter into bilateral relations for the relocation of labor.

2. *The Left*

Trust in emigration remained quite strong in the very first few years after the war. The hardships of reconstruction, the enduring of high structural unemployment, the question of the return of war veterans, industrial policy problems, and the unfreezing of layoffs did nothing but fuel the hope that recourse to emigration abroad could assuage social tensions and stimulate the economy. The first news from the countries engaged in reconstruction and in need of labor were not good. The intent of national governments was to keep their respective labor markets rigidly under control. Job availability was limited to prevalently part-time or fixed-term employment. Wages were low and working conditions especially harsh. This was a far cry from the “manna from heaven” that the post-war managerial class had hoped for, drawing—with inevitable manipulations—on memories of emigration in the Liberal age. And so now the topic of the political and union debate was no longer merely whether emigration should be encouraged or not, but also *how* to reorganize emigration. Rifts began to deepen, even before the breakdown of the government alliance in May 1947.

As early as January 1947, in an editorial on the newspaper *l'Unità* entitled “Politica dell'emigrazione,” Giuseppe Di Vittorio warned against the dangers of an emigration lacking the necessary safeguards:

¹⁶ *Lavoro per ventimila italiani*, “L'Unità”, 30 April 1946, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Il trattamento della Francia agli operai italiani che emigreranno*, “L'Unità”, 21 March 1947, p. 1.

As long as Italy is forced to count on the emigration of a significant part of its children, it is clear that the Italian government will have to have an emigration policy of its own. The guidelines of this policy are simple and clear. In the first place, emigration must be limited to the indispensable minimum. It should be regarded as something regrettable, although inevitable, and one should not seek the solution to serious national problems in it. Secondly, when many countries request Italian labor, we must strive to: a) limit the emigration of specialized labor, so that our country will not find itself lacking of it for its own reconstruction; b) favor emigration to those countries offering the best conditions for our emigrants and the highest advantages for our national economy; c) not allow any emigration to countries not offering sufficient guarantees to emigrants, even if they offer Italy advantageous exchanges in return.¹⁸

In sum, emigration was a dramatic but inevitable decision, and in any case not a definitive one. This was not only Di Vittorio's opinion, but also that of broad sectors of the political and trade union Left. With the passing of the months and years, however, partly as an effect of the break with De Gasperi in May 1947 and the exit of left-wing parties from the government, the polemic became increasingly harsh and the cautious trust in the migratory instrument displayed on the morrow of the war turned into outright diffidence. Of course, this change in attitude was influenced by the overall trend in the resuming of migration. Once across the border, workers faced huge problems and difficulties. There was a growth in illegal migratory flows absent any form of protection, and Italian institutions—and especially the consular network abroad—were proving inadequate in providing assistance to immigrants.

Judgments thus became increasingly negative, especially when it became clear that emigration could not solve the structural problems of Italian reconstruction. On the occasion of the presentation of its Plan for Work in February 1950, the Left began to question the central assumption of the emigration-reconstruction nexus. Their plan was to enact a middle and long-term action program to hire jobless workers and develop the country, especially its most depressed areas. According to Di Vittorio, the plan could provide an effective alternative to emigration. In his opinion, emigration has become not only a harsh solution, but also an impracticable one because of international restrictions to free circulation.

I have had the fortune or misfortune of living abroad for many years in several countries, and of being in contact with the immigrant masses. The things that happen there are amazing: when there is a scarcity of labor, all recognize the rights of foreign workers; as soon as there is a hint of a crisis, of a decline of work, they start talking about “ouvriers étrangers,” and do you

¹⁸ Giuseppe Di Vittorio, *Politica dell'emigrazione*, “L'Unità”, 18 January 1947, p. 1.

known what industrialists do to get rid of foreign workers as soon as possible? They report them to the police [...]. The path of emigration does not hold just deception, but also suffering, sometimes blood, and almost always humiliation. Besides, although we want to accept it as the lesser evil (provided certain conditions are met, such as equal social rights for Italian and local workers), we have seen that the doors of emigration are practically closed. There is no point in waxing lyrical on emigration.¹⁹

3. The Christian Democrat party

But it was not just the Left that entertained perplexities regarding the government's migratory policy. In the Catholic milieu, too, the migratory machine set up by the postwar governments was stirring up doubts and discussions. Here is a letter that Luigi Sturzo sent De Gasperi on 13 December 1947:

We must give back their freedom to the people who want to migrate, favor family emigration, and avoid political emigration and emigration with the unlimited interference of the Social-Communists. Free up assistance to emigrants abroad, avoiding preferences and the political propaganda of any party, with no exception. I appeal to your high conscience as an Italian and a Catholic to put a remedy to the present evil, which among other things is also contributing to slowing down emigration itself. I know very well that there the Ministry of Labor has raised "professional" objections, but being a friend of yours—and a Catholic by faith and practice—the current minister will have to listen to the pressing appeal from Italian Catholics to solve this serious problem.²⁰

According to Sturzo, De Gasperi needed to curb the emigration of large contingents of single men, because this limited the possibility for an equally significant emigration of whole families to develop, an emigration unfettered by bilateral agreements. Sturzo thus promoted an individualistic mode of emigration, one where protection and assistance was given to families rather than workers. The purpose was to bring about a more harmonious evolution of the migratory experience and, at the same time, contain the influence of the Left. Sturzo's position drew on an already well-established trend in Catholic thought that sought, even during the second postwar period, to situate migration within the more complex theoretical framework of relations between the individual, the family, the State, and society. On this subject, it

¹⁹ *Conferenza nazionale di presentazione del Piano per il lavoro*, 18-20 February 1950, p. 479.

²⁰ Archivio centrale dello Stato (Acs) Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri (Pcm), De Gasperi 1944-53, b. 24, fasc. "Emigrazione", letter from Sturzo to De Gasperi, 13 December 1947.

may be interesting to quote an excerpt from a discussion that appeared in *Civiltà cattolica* in November 1947, signed by A. De Marco.

In the study of mass social phenomena, we are generally led to consider them, like the major phenomena of the physical world, as a single entity, almost as if the mass was nothing but a sum of nameless units, in which the individuals composing it are confused and disappear, regardless of their personality [...]. The same mistake is usually made when the subject is emigration [...]. Beginning the study of international emigration from the living reality of the emigrant and his family, and placing their persons at the center of a theory means giving this theory a content that adheres much more closely to life.²¹

The advice about the Ministry of Labor was not the only advice Luigi Sturzo gave De Gasperi regarding migratory policy and its institutional reorganization. Having a keen interest in the lives of Italian-American communities, Sturzo mainly dwelled on the issues of assistance of, and propaganda among, Italians abroad, who in the immediate postwar period were regarded as a fundamental resource in the political balances of the transition from Fascism to democracy. In a letter of 29 June 1945, shortly after the formation of the Parri government (in which De Gasperi was Minister of Foreign Affairs), Sturzo complained about the permanence of the Subsecretariat of Italians Abroad among the offices of the Ministry. This institution, he argued, needed to be updated and reorganized within the shortest delay:

I see that the Subsecretariat of Italians Abroad is still there. I doubt the usefulness of such a designation, which reminds one of Fascism, instead of the name of Commissariat for Emigration, which should be reorganized (if it has not been yet). What should be improved is foreign press and propaganda. Abroad Italy gets bad press, with some exceptions such as Mrs. Anne O'Hara McCormick's article in the N.Y. Times, a few articles in the N.Y. Post, some articles by Welles, and a rare one by Dorothy Thompson. Correspondents are often harsh and play almost everything down, or worse, they give no information or trash or mutilate the little information they get (unless it is about scandals or former Fascists). Once Sforza was prominent [in foreign news], now no one talks about him anymore. The names of Scelba and Jacini as ministers have been mentioned only by one newspaper, in two hidden-away lines [...]. The effect of all this on the Italian community is depression, a lack of trust in Italy, and a new surge of admiration for Mussolini betrayed by the king.²²

²¹ Alberto De Marco, *I fenomeni migratori sono soltanto di origine economica?*, "La Civiltà Cattolica", 15 November 1947, pp. 303-16.

²² Luigi Sturzo – Alcide De Gasperi, *Carteggio (1920-1953)*, edited by Giovanni Antonazzi, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1999, p. 144. For another, more exhaustive publication of this

After a couple of weeks (16 July 1945), Sturzo drove the point further home, stressing once again that propaganda among Italians abroad was just about totally neglected, and this generated what he regarded as a dangerous situation:

Here there is only one newspaper written in the Italian language, which lauds, not the government, but the Communist ministers, to whom it ascribes the merit for all that the government does. And then there is nothing but criticism from the right wing (Catholics) and the left wing (Salvemini, anarchists, old school socialists, and anti-Communists). The newspaper that defends the government to some extent is that of the Mazzini Society, which is in contact with the ambassador. The *Progresso* is directed by a former Fascist who is not given much credit. In substance what we lack is: 1) a bulletin of truthfully reported Italian news to be distributed to the big press as well as newspapers in Italian; 2) the vigor of a moral and political revival in Italy capable of orienting all Italians abroad and giving them hope; 3) a clear statement that Italy does not wish to become prey of demagogues and revolutionaries, and that all are united in this sentiment; 4) a constant defense of Italian politics from all accusations, or, rather than accusations, downplaying and depreciation that generate discomfort, lack of trust, and eventually lack of interest and contempt. In spite of all this, the embassy and the friends of Italy are at work etc. I will keep working myself.²³

We know that, while the organizational machine moved with a certain speed on the front of propaganda—the peak was reached with the election of 18 April 1948, which the Christian Democrats won with the support of Italian Americans—the aid machine did not move with comparable rapidity. The Italians who departed the country were usually left to their own devices, or rather, they received social protection and assistance in their approach to and preparation for emigration, but once abroad they received little assistance from Italian embassies and diplomatic personnel just about anywhere they went. It is precisely in this sector that, ever since 1945, political polemics flared up and a number of reform proposals were put forward.

Remaining within the Christian Democrat milieu, one cannot overlook the role played by Amintore Fanfani, a role that was different from De Gasperi's both in the political orientation of Fanfani's action on emigration and in institutional terms. While De Gasperi sought the international stage by promoting international agreements for the expatriation of workers, emphasizing the diplomatic dimension of migratory policies, Fanfani dealt with the "internal front." Especially during his tenure as Minister of Labor

correspondence, see Luigi Sturzo – Alcide De Gasperi, *Carteggio (1920-1953)*, edited by Francesco Malgeri, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli 2006.

²³ L. Sturzo – A. De Gasperi, *Carteggio (1920-1953)*, cit., p. 146.

and Welfare, Fanfani reorganized the peripheral structures of the ministry and promoted a reform of the government employment agency whose aim was to fight unemployment by using the whole administrative machine at his disposal. In this project, emigration had a fundamental space and the agencies of the ministry gradually increased their jurisdiction over the selection and recruitment of emigrants.²⁴

In conclusion, we can affirm that in the years of the reconstruction the migratory question was a major theme in the public debate. As we have seen, this debate saw very different political subjects holding similar positions, and thus undermined the cohesiveness of parties, often generating rifts and tensions within them.

Emigration resumed at the end of the war, but in ways and quantities that the Italian governments were dissatisfied with. In 1949, even the Direzione Generale dell'Emigrazione of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was forced to admit that the expectations of a few years earlier had been excessive, and announced a further reduction of migratory outflows in the following years.²⁵ This rich and articulate debate, however, did not adequately translate into concrete measures. Of these there were only a few, and uncoordinated. Emigration continued to be managed by too many different public subjects, sometimes even competing with one another, especially the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Labor. Plans to place emigration under the authority of a single organization failed. Attempts to rationalize assistance and support policies for emigrants were undermined by bureaucratic rigidities and the inevitable political conveniences. Furthermore, some fundamental measures to simplify procedures, limit illegal emigration, and mitigate the problems of departing emigrants were approved only very belatedly. The new act on passports was only approved on March 28, 1952, and it was not until the Act of 9 April 1959 that emigrants were finally granted the free issuing of passports. Not to mention internal immigration: the anti-urbanization laws issued by the Fascists were only abolished in 1961.

²⁴ See Amintore Fanfani, *Anni difficili ma non sterili*, Cappelli, Bologna, 1958; Paolo Pombeni, *I partiti e la politica dal 1948 al 1963*, in Giovanni Sabbatucci, Vittorio Vidotto (eds), *Storia d'Italia, La Repubblica*, cit., pp. 173-4; Mariuccia Salvati, *Stato e industria nella ricostruzione. Alle origini del potere democristiano, 1944-49*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1982, pp. 400-403.

²⁵ Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Direzione generale dell'emigrazione, *Emigrazione italiana (situazione - prospettive - problemi)*, Roma 1949, p. 47.