
Italian Emigration to France during Crispi's First Government (1887-1891)

Enrico Serra
University of Bologna

This essay is based on research in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Serie Politica*, series *ambasciata e consolati*, *Fondo Crispi*), in the Central State Archive, Rome (*Fondo Presidenza del Consiglio*, *Fondo Crispi*, *Fondo Ministero degli Interni*), and in parliamentary papers. We have also drawn on the existing monograph literature, although this is scanty for the period in question. "Commissariat for Emigration" which contains reports from diplomatic agents and consulates in France, including the important report by the then ambassador Tornielli, who was to die some five years later in Paris where he had acted as Italy's diplomatic representative for thirteen years.¹ We have not consulted the French archives, so the remarks which follow represent primarily Italian impressions and only indirectly those of French contemporaries.

We do not intend to embark on the polemic over emigration which developed in Italy after unification, for this has been dealt with in great detail in the study by the late Fernando Manzotti, in a fine general essay by Renzo De Felice, as well as in Nitti's extremely interesting pamphlet

¹ *Min. Affari Esteri Emigrazione e Colonie: Raccolta dei Rapporti dei RR. Agenti Diplomatici e Consolari*. Vol. 1, Europe Part. 1. France (Rome 1903). See also E. SERRA, "Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano" in *Storia e Politica* 1963, pp. 336-363. There are also references to earlier historical aspects of emigration in S. WLOCEVSKI, *L'Installation des italiens en France*, Paris 1934 and in J. MESNAUD, *De l'immigration étrangère en France considérée au point de vue économique* (Doctoral thesis), Paris 1902, and R. PARIS, "L'Italia fuori d'Italia", in *Storia d'Italia* (Einaudi, Turin) 1975, pp. 525 et seq.

which criticised Crispi's policy from a free-trade position.² Crispi's interest in the problem of emigration had always been strong, for a number of reasons. Partly this was due to the fact that, as a Sicilian, he came from one of the areas most directly affected. Partly it was due to the fact that he had himself, as an exile, lived amongst Italian emigrés in France, and hence had a first-hand knowledge of the problems arising.

It would not in any case have been possible for Crispi to have avoided the problem, given the magnitude which it began to assume in the 1880s, when the average number of emigrants per year began to exceed 70,000 (although this is almost certainly a minimal figure). The *Società Geografica Italiana*, an excellent institution in very many ways and one whose publications constitute an extremely useful historical source — and I must thank the late Walter Maturi for having pointed this out to me — set up a special commission in March 1885 to conduct a statistical investigation on Italian emigration, and to advise on the best means of protecting the emigrant from unscrupulous speculators. In 1888 the same commission was reconstituted under the chairmanship of Giacomo Malvano, former Secretary General at the Foreign Office (to which he returned after the fall of Crispi's government), and including as a member Luigi Bodio, the director general of statistics in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, who was also a man of great talent and as close a friend of Crispi as Malvano was an opponent. The investigation was carried out by means of questionnaires and was devoted exclusively to extra-European migration, which means that it is of little direct value to us except for certain incidental information on wages, jobs, and so forth in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Reunion Island.³ The data clearly confirm, however, that the Italian emigrants were certainly the weakest and least protected social group, who were frequently victims of what were authentic rackets and confidence tricks worked on them by unscrupulous agents.⁴

Bodio kept Crispi informed of the work of the commission, and disabused him in particular of his pet theory that Italian emigration could be

² F. MANZOTTI, *La Polemica sull'emigrazione nell'Italia Unita (fino alla prima guerra mondiale)*, Rome 1962; R. DE FELICE, *L'Emigrazione e gli emigranti nell'ultimo secolo*, Rome 1964; F.S. NITTI, *L'emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari*, Turin 1888 (later included in *Scritti sulla Questione Meridionale*, Bari 1958). More recently see A. ANNINO, "La politica migratoria dello Stato post-unitario" in *Il Ponte*, special issue dedicated to "Emigration; a hundred years and 26 millions", Florence, Nov.-Dec. 1974, esp. pp. 1247-1258.

³ *Indagini sulla emigrazione italiana all'estero, fatta per cura della Società Geografica Italiana (1888-1889)*, Rome 1890.

⁴ ACS, *Ministero degli Interni*, report from the prefect of Cuneo, January & July 1887; *Ibid.*, prefect of Cosenza, October 1887; *Ibid.*, prefect of Caserta, 2nd semester 1887.

diverted to Sardinia.⁵ When Crispi succeeded to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers on the death of Depretis, he also assumed the portfolios of the Foreign and Interior ministries, and hence had three separate reasons for becoming involved in the emigration issue. The need was the more pressing as Italy and Austria were by that time the only European countries which did not have legislation on emigration, and where the phenomenon was controlled only by ordinary civil policing norms.⁶

One of Crispi's first initiatives was to instruct the trusted Bodio to undertake an inquiry into the causes and features of Italian emigration. The results of this investigation, which was carried out in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, were presented to Crispi by Bodio in November 1888. The fundamental and most widespread cause of emigration was poverty, the report concluded, not only in the South but also in Lombardy, Emilia and the Veneto. In second place came the hope for betterment, lack of work, inadequate wages, poor harvests, etc. It was the latter which had caused peasants to follow the town craftsmen and labourers into the migratory flow. Bodio remarked that the causes showed "yet again that emigration presents absolutely no danger to agriculture because it serves to draw away labour which is not required".⁷

Crispi became persuaded that, despite the efforts of the local Prefects, it was neither possible nor even desirable to stem the flood. At the same time, the evils must be limited. He had asked Bodio to provide a summary of the legislation and regulations and regulations adopted in the main European states, especially those regarding the transport agents and organizers, the contracts used, cash deposits required and the insurance obligations imposed. This Bodio did by the end of November 1887, and sent Crispi details of the French law of 18th July 1860, the French Decree of 9th March 1861, and of the French Ordinance of 2nd March 1878, which required the obtaining of permission from the Ministry before the recruiting and transportation of emigrants could take place, laid down responsibilities of both the companies and their agents, and also made it obligatory to pay cash guarantees.⁸

Crispi certainly lost no time, as he was able to present a draft special law on emigration to the Chamber on the 15th December which was a

⁵ ACS CRISPI PAPERS, Bodio to Crispi, 14th November 1888, L. 344.

⁶ The then Minister Finali presented a draft law on emigration in 1876 which was not discussed in the Chamber, as also befell the proposals for parliamentary action put forward in 1878 by Minghetti, Luzzatti, and Sonnino. See V. GROSSI, "La politica dell'emigrazione in Italia nell'ultimo trentennio 1868-1898", in *Rivista Marittima* 1899, Jan.

⁷ ACS CRISPI PAPERS, Bodio to Crispi 14th Nov. 1888, L. 344, appendix E. This contains the prefectural reports, especially those from Piedmont.

⁸ See V. GROSSI, "La politica dell'emigrazione nei principali Stati d'Europa (Studio di legislazione comparativa)", in *Riv. Politica Letteraria* 1899; V. BRIANI, *L'Emigrazione Italiana ieri e oggi*, Rome 1959.

significant advance on Depretis' views that the whole business could be controlled through existing public security measures. Crispi declared: "I judge it to be useless to discuss whether emigration is good or bad, whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, or vice versa. Emigration is a fact which we do not have the right to suppress nor the means to prevent". He emphasised the need for governmental action to safeguard the interests of the emigrants before and after transportation, and also "to preserve the links which remain with their fatherland, so that this too may share in the fruits of their labours".⁹

Crispi's policy on emigration was certainly more energetic than that of his predecessors. But, as Manzotti has rightly observed, it was also hesitant and contradictory, shifting between recognition of the loss of manpower involved, on one hand, and the undoubted economic and social advantages on the other.¹⁰ He did, however, introduce one quite new element in treating the problem of the Italian emigrant as an aspect of foreign policy, and in considering the Italian emigrants abroad as being linked to the mother-country which had an obligation to help and protect them.

Again it was Bodio who supplied him with the details of Italian emigration in 1887. There were 215,665 emigrants, 129,463 of whom were destined for the Americas, the majority of whom sailed from Genoa, Naples and Palermo, as well as from Marseilles and Le Havre. There were 31,185 emigrants to metropolitan France.¹¹ The figures are only of use as a rough guide, as they do not differentiate between temporary and permanent emigrants, even though such a distinction is difficult, if not impossible, to draw because so many obtained temporary permits to emigrate to European countries and then moved on to the Americas. Nor do the figures take account of clandestine emigration, which was prevalent in all frontier areas, and also in the South where the migratory phenomenon was growing daily.¹² Often it was encouraged by the shipping agents, the better to deceive their unwitting clients, and as a result the government proposed to regulate the emigration agencies, to remove abuses and to guarantee the emigrants both decent transports and also some assistance on arrival.

⁹ *Atti Parl.*, Chamber of Deputies Leg. VI, 11 Sept. (1887), n. 85.

¹⁰ F. MANZOTTI, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 et seq.; A. ANNINO, *op. cit.*, p. 1248 et seq.

¹¹ These figures were published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* (May 1888) and then in the *Statistica sull'Emigrazione* edited by the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry (Rome 1892, p. 91). The figures in the two sources are not identical. Those given by Bodio are slightly higher, but he himself had reservations on their accuracy and had pointed out that an Italian emigrating to America via France would probably be counted twice. It was also necessary to take into account the numbers being repatriated, and these in 1886 reached 15,000 from the Americas alone.

¹² Clandestine emigration was also considerable — see S. GUARNA, *I Clandestini* in the special issue of *Il Ponte* (cit. sopra), pp. 1601-1616.

Crispi informed the Chamber that he had set up a "Special Emigration Section" in the Ministry of the Interior, and that he himself was directly concerned in the problem. On the 3rd May 1888 the Chamber received the report of the Commission which had been set up to examine Crispi's draft proposal under the chairmanship of Seismit Doda, which had included Brunialti, Finocchiaro Aprile, Enrico Ferri and Rocco De Zerbi. In agreement with the government, the Commission proposed a counter-project which was then approved with minor changes.¹³

It was established that "Emigration may be freely undertaken",¹⁴ but that the main concern should be to prevent the agents' and carriers' lucrative exploitation of the poorest emigrants. It was primarily concerned with overseas emigration, and at that time even emigration to France was generally by sea. Crispi, it should also be noted, sent a memorandum in his capacity as Minister of the Interior, to all Italian consuls abroad (memo 15th Jan, no. 11900), informing them that direct correspondence between the consuls and the Ministry of the Interior was fully authorized and "in no way detracts from the competence of the Foreign Ministry or from its beneficial action in defence of our emigrants and our colonies". This was remarkable, especially as Crispi in the same memo asked the consuls to report to the Ministry of the Interior on nine different points (the physical and hygienic conditions of Italian emigrants, their occupations, their wages, the legislative situation, possibilities of repatriation, etc.) and also to make a report on the general situation of Italian emigration twice a year. It seems safe to say that Crispi was attempting to pave the way for the governmental action expected by increasing the power of the Interior Ministry, on which it was dependent at home. However, the diplomatic agents continued to report directly to their own Ministry, which then rerouted their reports to the Interior Ministry.

The difficulties confronting Italian emigrants in France varied in kind. Even at this time, the Italians formed the second largest ethnic group, after the Belgians, although the latter were much less easily distinguished from the French whose language they spoke, by and large. As a result the Italians attracted the attention of French nationalists and others contemptuous of their poverty-stricken state. Crispi's advent to power aggravated this attitude, given that the new prime minister was known to have opposed the cession of Nice and Savoy and of the Tunisian protectorate,

¹³ 30th Dec. 1888, n. 5866 (published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 31st Dec.). On 10th January 1889 the Royal Decree on the "Regulations for the Law of 30.12.88 on emigration" was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*.

¹⁴ For soldiers on leave the permission of the War Ministry was necessary, but this was a counter-productive measure and encouraged illegal emigration.

was considered to be the most ardent admirer of the Triple Alliance in Italian political circles, and was a declared enemy of socialism.

French policy was contradictory, perhaps of necessity. The French population at that time stood at about 38 millions, but natural increase was almost negligible — only some 165,253 individuals between 1886 and 1891, with an even smaller increase between 1891-6 (133,819), including naturalizations. The number of foreigners had risen from about 380,000 in 1851 to about one million in 1880 and 1,125,000 in 1886. One well known writer, Paul Leroly-Beaulieu, had recommended immigration as an antidote to population stagnation, which made the position of the immigrants easier. Paris in particular attempted to encourage immigrants.¹⁵ By 1886 there were 281,394 Italian emigrants in France,¹⁶ and every year some 30,000 Italians entered France — 31,185 in 1887, 31,248 in 1891. The most numerous were the Piedmontese, followed by Tuscans (especially from Massa Carrara), Lombards, Emilians, Venetians (who headed in larger numbers for Germany and Austria), and the southerners. The latter, who proved the most ready to marry French women, constituted the most logical objective of the French government's policy of assimilation.

In contrast to the government's policy, however, Italian emigration was also confronted with the hostility of French unions and workers' organizations, due to the fact that the Italian immigrants were of necessity obliged to accept the heaviest work and also were prepared to accept low wages. This hostility was increased by a rise in unemployment, which was particularly marked in certain regions of southern France.

Early in 1888 Thaon de Revel,¹⁷ the vice-consul in Toulon, reported that French worker organizations had prevented Italian workers from being re-employed in the Arsenal. He added that the press had also carried reports that the deputy for the Vaar, Maurel, intended to propose a law which would limit the number of foreign workers employed in dockyards in receipt of government contracts to a maximum of one-sixth of the labour force. The report concluded by suggesting that this limit on foreign workers would be used to effect the total exclusion of Italians from the dockyards. The numbers involved at that time included about half of the 3,000 workers employed by the *Société des Forges et Chantiers* and about

¹⁵ See the Torrielli report *op. cit.*, pp. 35 et seq.

¹⁶ The highest numbers were in the consular district of Marseilles (108,014), which included Nimes, Perpignan, Montpellier, Toulouse etc. This was followed by Paris (covering the Pas de Calais, Marne and Yonne) with 40,717; then Nice (39,165), then Besançon (including the Meuse, Dijon and Nancy — with 32,741), Chambéry (19,954), Lyons (19,575) etc.

¹⁷ *AEI*: (Min. Foreign Affairs) Thaon de Revel to Spagnolini (Marseilles) 2nd Feb. R. 237 - secret report returned to Rome by R. 498 R. 3rd Feb. The report was sent on to the Minister of the Interior.

another thousand employed by the Ciotat company, most of them for several years. It was also feared that similar measures would deprive thousands of other Italians employed by municipal authorities and in private factories of work (the consul referred to the "hundreds and thousands of our fellow countrymen working in France"). The report also speculated on the possibilities of directing the Italians who had not found a chance of improving their social condition in France to other emigrant territories, especially the Americas, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

There was also another source of friction, and this arose from the propaganda conducted by Italian socialists and anarchists amongst the French workers. A pamphlet entitled "The Federation of Workers of Italy to the Workers of France" for example, began as follows:

"Who are we? We are men like you; like you we are oppressed, exploited and wretched. Like you we have capitalists who starve us and governments which gag us: we have our own Sadi Carnot in Umberto and our own Jules Ferry in the shape of Crispi... French Comrades, if there is to be war let it not be between us wretched slaves: your enemy is not at Rome, he is in your midst and is called Ferry, Wilson, Gallifet, Rothschild etc."

Such propaganda was naturally a source of concern in both Paris and Rome. The French government took the precaution of expelling some of the Italians who were considered to be "dangerous" and exerted pressure on others to accept French nationality.

Between late 1887 and the beginning of 1888 the tension between Italy and France increased to the point where war seemed highly possible. France refused to enter into a navigation treaty, and a renewal of the trade agreement of 1881 which was due to expire in February 1888 seemed highly improbable in view of the claims advanced by Crispi. In fact, in rebuffing the French proposals to prorogue the treaty Crispi had already embarked on the tariff war between France and Italy, which was to prove entirely damaging to the latter's interests.

The situation could not but affect the circumstances of the Italian workers in France. In creating a generally hostile atmosphere, the situation introduced an anti-Italian element at the very moment when the numbers of foreign immigrant workers were once again increasing. One example of this was the anti-Italian demonstrations at Grenoble, when the Assize Court acquitted the Guerra brothers who had confessed to murdering an Italian miner named Giovanni Perrucchetti.¹⁹ It also provided the

¹⁸ Including the Niçois Filippo Fantapie - Consul at Nice to Min. Foreign Affairs, 29th Aug. R. 1427.

¹⁹ AEI: Consul in Lyon (Basso) to Min. F. Affairs, 26th Feb. 1888. R. 93. Basso to Crispi 17th March R. 78. The ambassador in Paris complained to the Foreign Minister Florens because the President of the Grenoble Assize Court had not intervened when the counsel for the War Ministry described the Italians as murderers: Menabrea to Crispi 17th March R. 203. Crispi approved this: AEI Crispi to Menabrea 28th March D. 7245/51.

French authorities with the chance to take further administrative measures prejudicial to the interests of the Italian workers.

The collapse of the navigation treaties between the two countries had had a decisive effect on the groups of Italian "sedentary" fishermen. The majority of these came from the centre and south of the peninsula and used to stay in France during the period and seasons when fishing was impossible, unlike the Ligurians who simply returned home with their vessels. Deprived of the protection of the navigation treaties, the former had only two alternatives — either return home permanently or else seek French citizenship, and it was the second course that the majority adopted.²⁰

But, as Thaon de Revel reported from Toulon at about the same time, these were by no means the only victims. The fear of remaining unemployed due to the campaign which was under way to exclude foreigners (for which read Italians) from employment in state industries and local authorities and from private companies which enjoyed state contracts or subsidies, the threat of expulsion should relations between the two countries deteriorate further, the pressures exerted by the French authorities and — although this does not appear in the consular reports — the mistrust of Crispi's government, had led large numbers of Italians, according to de Revel virtually all of them in fact, to apply for naturalization. While this was quite reasonable in the case of those who had been in France for some time, were married to Frenchwomen and hence had ties and interests in French society, it was much less so for many others. In the province of Toulon the requests for naturalization were sufficiently great to constitute "a true scandal".²¹ Other considerations apart, argued Thaon de Revel, in a report addressed directly to Crispi (and therefore worded in such a manner as to appeal to the recipient), the naturalizations would in the event of war constitute a "very grave danger", since many of the workers came from villages close to the French frontier and would therefore be in a position to offer invaluable assistance to the French military: "he who turns his back on his fatherland may also be prepared to sell it". De Revel concluded by suggesting that Crispi initiate a press campaign in "*La Riforma*". In view of all this it would be very useful to know more about the number of non-seasonal Italian workers in France and also the total number of naturalization requests. On the second point the help of the French section of the *Italo-French Committee for Historical*

²⁰ AEI: Spagnolini (Marseilles) to F. Min., 9th Feb. 1888 R. 502 (Secret), forwarded to Thaon de Revel (Toulon), 8th Feb.

²¹ AEI: Thaon de Revel to For. Min. 13th March R. 1414: "the humiliating spectacle which is paraded before the gaze of the French, the demoralizing effect which this has in turn on the Italians, drives us to oppose this lack of patriotic sentiment with all the moral force at my command". The consul also complained that Italians frequently applied for residence permits without bothering to seek consular authorization first.

Studies would be invaluable, because the material lies in the French municipal archives, the prefectures of Police and the French Interior Ministry.

The Italian Foreign Ministry could come up with no better answer than to offer free repatriation for the Italian workers who found themselves without jobs and then turned to the consulates. It gave assurance that "the government would not fail to act in the light of events in a way which was consistent with national dignity and the interest of the colony."²² The ambassador in Paris, Menabrea, also acknowledged that there was no room for diplomatic intervention: "only recently — he reported — I have protested to M. Flourens about this ostracism and in particular against the obligation to adopt French nationality which is being pressed on those of our workers who desire to continue in employment". He also added, however, that the French government was bound to take note of the violently anti-Italian pressure arising from public opinion, which in itself suggested that a bilateral agreement to solve the problems was unlikely. Indeed, on the expiry of the trade agreement (article 1 of which established the right of Italians to work in France) it was to be expected that the Italians would be exposed to harrassment and even expulsion from France, and the government would no longer even have the legal means of preventing this.²³

Crispi could do little but concur, and restricted himself to commenting, "given that the force of the treaty guarantee, which might in certain cases have been invoked, has decreased it would now be better to base future arguments on the reciprocal convenience accruing to both countries, in economic terms, from the situation, and also on the common concern of the two Governments to overlook nothing in the political sphere which will help remove all sources of friction between the Countries". The tone was all the more restrained when one bears in mind the anti-French eruptions of the pro-Crispi press at this time.²⁴

Crispi also demonstrated similar moderation in the face of the anti-Italian campaign in Algeria and the pressure exerted by the Algerian authorities to persuade Italians to accept naturalization. He offered to repatriate or else transport to the United States all the Italians who found themselves destitute, at the State's expense, reminding them that in Italy only a small number of them could hope to find work in public building projects. As far as naturalization was concerned, Crispi informed the consul in Algiers: "I believe it opportune to remind you that in such matters when those concerned persist, despite your exhortations, in demanding French naturalization, it is the duty of His Majesty's Consul to limit himself solely to

²² AEI: For. Min. to Spagnolini, 19th Feb. D. 2306/48 Secret; *Ibid*, 24th Feb. D. 2831/55.

²³ AEI: Menabrea to Crispi, 24th Feb. R. 120.

²⁴ AEI: Crispi to Menabrea, 28th March.

receiving the declaration of renunciation, as laid down in the regulations of the Registrar General'.²⁵

This restraint was most unusual in a man of Crispi's temperament, but was due to the fact that on February 2nd the French deputy Pradon had made reference in the French parliament, while speaking in the name of the Commission which had been established to look into the question, to four proposed laws which sought to introduce certain restrictions on the residence of foreigners in France, which had for some time been under consideration. Among other things, this would have obliged foreigners to deposit various papers, such as passports, birth, marriage, widowhood certificates, welfare records, together with the relevant translations and consular authentications, with the French police in order to obtain residence permits.

Crispi requested the embassies in the countries bordering on France to inform him of the reactions of those governments to the four proposed French laws. The reply from Brussels was that the proposed measures "were in large part difficult to reconcile with treaty obligations still in force". The Belgians did not, however, intend to protest alone, for they were sure that this would lead to defeat, and there was still the possibility that the French government would not support the proposals in which case they would be defeated in parliament. De Launay, the Italian ambassador in Berlin, also argued that the French government would avoid "even in these circumstances any action which might give rise to incidents with a neighbouring State, which would reciprocally restrict its freedom at some future date in measures towards the citizens of that State, especially in the provinces near the borders".²⁶ This was subsequently confirmed by the Secretary for State for Foreign Affairs. In Berne, Peiroleri reported that the Swiss government intended to "keep itself extraneous" until such time as the proposed legislation infringed rights specifically covered in existing treaty arrangements, especially those which guaranteed Swiss citizens in France security of residence and freedom to conduct their trade and industry in the same way as any French national. Italy in fact was isolated, especially as the measures in question were essentially internal and therefore quite within the legitimate powers of the French authorities.

²⁵ *AEI*: Crispi to the Italian Consul in Algeria, 1st March (no number); Royal Consul in Algeria to Crispi 17th March R. 378/98; Crispi to Mainani d'Intignano (Algeria), 30th March D. 7571/59. Hostility to Italian workers was also evident in Tunisia — Consul in Tunis to Crispi, 30th Nov. R. 1556/410.

²⁶ *AEI*: *Crispi to Berlin*, Brussels and Berne 18th March D. 5711,2,3; *ibid*, Della Croce (Brussels) to Crispi, 23rd March, R. 5712/15; *ibid*, 24th March, D. 120/65; *ibid*, 18th April, R. 1687; Launay to Crispi, 25th March, R. 155; *ibid*, 4th April, R. 180; Peiroleri to Crispi, 30th March, R. 90 (received 4th April).

On October 2nd the Presidential decree on the residence and domicile of foreigners was published in the "*Journal Officiel*". This allowed foreign residents scarcely a month in which to obtain and produce all the papers which were required, and all duly translated into French. The Foreign Minister, Goblet, told Ressman that the German ambassador had found the decree entirely legitimate since equally strict measures were in force in Germany. Ressman also knew that the decree was not aimed solely at the Belgian and Italian workers, but had also been encouraged by Russia over the tolerance with which the French treated a large colony of Russian nihilists, who were now to be expelled.²⁷ The Swiss Federal Council also recognized the legitimacy of the French Decree.²⁸

At precisely this time Crispi was also led, for reasons which are well known, to modify his policy towards France. He not only gave up the idea of making a diplomatic protest over the French presidential decree, but when Gérard, the chargé d'affaires, informed him of his government's intention of sending Mariani as ambassador to Rome he replied: "... in so far as the new ambassador comes to Rome with favourable intentions, I shall do all possible to proceed in agreement with him on the matters which concern both our countries".³⁰ Almost simultaneously the French Foreign Minister, Goblet, informed the Chamber in Paris that his government intended to maintain its diplomatic presence at the Vatican, but that it was necessary to disabuse the Pope of the hope that either the present or any other French government would wish to aid him restore his temporal powers.³¹

The presidential decree posed a number of technical problems. It was unclear whether seasonal labourers from Italy were also subject to the regulations. In Corsica alone they numbered 14,000, and there were many more on the Côte d'Azur. Even more serious was the time limit of one month for presenting the documents, many of which, such as passports and military service certificates, required information from local authorities, and in addition the greater part of the Italian workers were both penniless and illiterate. The difficulties were overcome by a tacit agreement. On one hand, the French authorities extended the time limit until 31st December, and rarely scrutinized individual documents very carefully. On the other, the Italian government instructed the mayors of the Kingdom to provide the documents requested by the Consulates free of charge. The Consulates were also requested to act as intermediaries

²⁷ AEI: Menabrea to Crispi, 8th August, T. 1992.

²⁸ AEI: Ressman to Crispi, 3rd Oct., T. 2490; 6th Oct., R. 1924; 8th Oct., T. 2533; 9th Oct., T. 2552.

²⁹ AEI: Peirolesi to Crispi, no date Oct., R. 298 (arrived 16th Oct.).

³⁰ AEI: Crispi to the Embassy in Paris, 9th Nov., T. 2088 (code).

³¹ AEI: Menabrea to Crispi, 14th Nov., T. 3276.

between the municipal authorities and the workers, "so that they may be enabled within the time laid down, to furnish the local authorities with the required documents".³²

It is difficult to say how many declarations of residence were made by Italian labourers in France, and it would be a worthwhile research project (for some young scholars). In Marseilles 33,243 declarations were made on behalf of 82,472 foreigners, of which the Italians presented 29,587 on behalf of 75,098 individuals.³³ Although these declarations were presumably not limited to the city proper alone, they serve to give some idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon.

Despite the Boulangist atmosphere in France and the Crispi regime in Italy, and even despite the hypersensitivity of the press in both countries, there were few incidents of any significance in 1888 or 1889.³⁴ Two tendencies continued to be evident, the attempts in France to assimilate the immigrants and the attempts of Crispi's government to preserve their links with the father-land. The efforts made by the Italian consulates to assist in the presentation of declarations of residence had revealed circumstances which the consul in Nice, Centurione, considered to be reprehensible. The sons of many Italian immigrants chose to do military service in France, which earned them immediate French citizenship. "He had repeatedly" — he informed Rome — "taken the parents to task, but they had simply informed him that it was not their wish, but their sons". This was also a frequent occurrence amongst Italian emigrants in the United States and in Latin America, but in a neighbouring country such as France it took on an altogether more serious aspect. Unfortunately we have no quantitative information on the problem. Centurione suggested in his report to Rome that the "inconvenience" could be avoided by requesting the French authorities to instruct their mayors to make monthly returns of the births to Italian parents in their localities to the Italian consulates, and these could

³² AEI: Colucci (Bastia) to the Paris Embassy, 26th Oct. Centurione (Nice) to Crispi, 3rd Nov., R. 463; Saint Martin (Nice) to Crispi, 28th Oct., R. 286. Sec. State F. Affairs, Damiani, to the Royal Consuls in Paris, Bastia, Lyons etc., 11th Nov. D. 36731.

³³ AEI: Simondetti to Crispi, 13th Feb., 1889, R. 559/90. This suggests that the consulate had neither copies of the declarations nor of a record of them, because the majority of the Italians had made them directly to the authorities without notifying the consulate. The consul requested the Prefect for the statistics, but these were refused: Simondetti to Crispi, 27th March, R. 1067/167.

³⁴ In March 1889 French workmen went on protest strike after Italians had been taken on to build some army barracks, and there were some brawls: AEI Basso (Lyons) to Crispi, 27th March, 1889, R. 65 (contains two reports from the Consul in Grenoble); *ibid.*, 3rd July, 1889, R.892. The F. Minister was pleased (5th April, D. 12721/81) to learn of this "vigilant and prudent attitude". There was also an incident in Marseilles in November when the captain of an Italian steamer, on orders from the consul, enlisted only Italians for his crew, and the French workers then staged a threatening demonstration.

then be entered on the call-up registers. Consequently on reaching the age of twenty the young men would automatically be called up, and would no longer enjoy the so-called "year's grace", which in practice led to opting for the French army.³⁵

Crispi had delegated the less important matters concerning emigration to Damiani, the Under-Secretary of State, and he was obliged to take note of the fact that as a result of a case which had arisen in Trieste, the Minister of Grace and Justice was opposed to an understanding of this nature. It was argued that it was prejudicial to the system observed hitherto in international agreements and also to the legislative procedures which stipulated that official documents should be transmitted exclusively by diplomatic channels. The Minister's views were so fixed that the Under-Secretary decided that there was little point in further insisting.³⁶ But what is surprising in the Under-Secretary's reply is that not only did he make no alternative suggestions, but did not even encourage the consul to ensure that the occurrence should remain as limited as possible. This silence may well be explained by the fact that the French government was on the point of introducing another law on foreign residents, which it did in fact on 26th June 1889 which retrospective force as from 1st January.

The terms of the new law were very simple: foreigners born in France to fathers who had also been born in France were considered to be Frenchmen. Those born in France to foreign parents were considered French if they were resident in France and if they had failed to present to the local town-hall a declaration repudiating French nationality and a statement of their wish to preserve their original nationality, such declarations to be made between the ages of 21 and 22. Those born in France to foreign parents but not resident in France were not obliged to make such declarations, but became French citizens if they were called up. A foreigner married to a Frenchwoman could apply for naturalization after a year. Even someone born in France but living abroad could apply for naturalization, provided this was done within a year of ceasing to be a minor. Finally, and the most far-reaching provision, parents, or in their absence a guardian, were empowered to opt for French nationality on behalf of their children while minors, so long as they had been born in France.

The law was brought into force in Algeria, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion Island, in the Foreign Legion, and then, following the Decree of 1897, in all of the French colonies. But the deputy Lalou also presented an even more Draconian proposal aimed at foreign residents to the Chamber, which was dominated by nationalists and Boulangists. Despite the strong

³⁵ AEI: Centurione to Crispi, 8th Jan., 1889, R. 13.

³⁶ AEI: Under Sec. State Damiani to Centurione; 19th Jan., 1888 (but in fact 1889), D. 2604/26.

press campaign waged in support by the Boulangist and clerical press, it was thought that the measure had little chance of succeeding.³⁷ The law of 1889 was seen as a very severe measure even by a man as moderate as the Italian ambassador in Paris, Tornielli, who was also a staunch supporter of Franco-Italian understanding, and his views are evident in the report of March 1902 to which we have already referred.

There is no question but that the law was highly damaging to the interests of the Italian immigrants. One has only to remember that the majority of the Italians were illiterate to understand what a labour and humiliation it was for them to make the requisite declarations. Many were too ashamed to go through the necessary procedures in the company of French colleagues amongst whom they wished to establish themselves, while others feared that they would be open to reprisals in the areas where they lived. The Italian Minister of Grace and Justice also noted that the new law profoundly changed the corresponding dispositions of the French civil code and was therefore potentially injurious to Italian nationals. All the same, after careful scrutiny he advised that "as the aforementioned law does not infringe rights guaranteed in international conventions, foreign States can have no reason for complaint". Therefore he advised the Foreign Minister that "in order to avoid in some degree the consequences" the consulates should be informed of the appropriate means of avoiding the worst consequences of the new law and also shown the ways of fending it off.³⁸

The resulting circular was dispatched on the 14th April under the signature of the Under-Secretary Damiani, with instructions that it be given maximum diffusion. The memo drew particular attention to the problem concerning sons born in France and domiciled outside Italy of parents also not resident in Italy (which would include those Italians who were resident there but had not been born there), as these would be liable to enrolment in the French call-up registers. If the youths were not to be subsequently called-up into the French army, it was essential that this should be avoided. The document also stressed that the requisite declarations either refuting or opting for French citizenship could be made by an authorized special attorney.

Complaints reached Rome from all quarters about the consequences of the new French law and the difficulties which it created. The Italian government as a result instructed its ambassador in Paris to request the French Foreign Minister to ensure that some of the worst problems were avoided. One of the most serious of these was the issue raised by the

³⁷ AEI: Consul in Bordeaux to For. Min., 10th Dec., R. 793; *ibid.*, 21st Dec., R. 809.

³⁸ AEI: Min. Grace & Justice to For. Min., 7th Feb., 1890, I. 3006; in reply to the note from Min. F. Affairs, 28th Jan., 1890, 2842.

consulates in Marseilles and Nice, who had discovered that the local authorities refused to accept the declarations declining French citizenship prepared by the consulates, on the grounds that these could only be presented through diplomatic channels and hence to the central government.³⁹

The ambassador, Menabrea, raised the question with Spuller in a pro-memoire dated 26th February, but received no reply as a Cabinet crisis had led to Spuller's replacement by Ribot. In conversation with the latter on 19th May, Menabrea raised the question again, but received no immediate promises. In the meantime a number of Italians had opted for Italian citizenship which gave rise to correspondence between the embassy and the Foreign Minister. The ambassador, as he later informed Crispi, accepted "in accordance with the instructions contained in the Ministerial telegram of 14th June giving provisional guidelines" that the certificates authenticating Italian citizenship which were attached to the declarations of citizenship should be issued by the embassy in Paris. In those cases where such declarations were issued by a consulate they should also contain a declaration by the embassy confirming that the holder was an Italian subject.⁴⁰

On the 12th July the French Minister Ribot wrote to Menabrea (who subsequently forwarded the letter to Crispi) in reply to an issue raised by the Italian consul in Marseilles who wished to obtain a list of the Italians included in the French army call-up register.⁴¹ The reply was negative. The Prime Minister and the War Minister had replied that all those entered in the call-up register were French citizens, and were the case to arise that an individual proved not to be a French national, then the onus was on the individual to prove this. The French authorities claimed that they could have no way of anticipating this in advance, and that they were unable to supply the complete call-up register.

Crispi deplored the fact that the French government was not prepared to accept the validity of certificates of citizenship issued by the consulates. It did not surprise him, in view of the fact that the manifest aim of the French law was to draw as many foreigners as possible into the French army's recruitment net, while maintaining some semblance of legality. But in Crispi's view the fault lay in the inadequate time permitted for an individual to declare his option, and he pointed out that it would be impossible for those born in the French colonies to exercise their option if it was obligatory for the requisite documents to be furnished through formal di-

³⁹ *AEI*: Damiani to Menabrea, 14th Feb., 5122/103; *ibid*, 25th Feb., D. 6573/128; Menabrea to Crispi, 22nd May, R. 423.

⁴⁰ *AEI*: Menabrea to Crispi, R. 606 (with the exchange of notes with Ribot attached). The telegram from Crispi dated 14th June is listed as n. 954. An identical telegram to the Italian consul in Marseilles is listed as 953.

⁴¹ *AEI*: Centurione to Crispi, 24th Feb., 1890, R. 777.

plomatic channels. Crispi instructed Menabrea to bring to Ribot's attention with urgency "our surprise and concern at the adoption of so rigid a measure despite the views of the Council of State which seems to lend itself to a more favourable interpretation" and he was also told to insist that at the very least it should be conceded that "the confirmations and documents issued to the competent French authorities by the Royal Consular Agents resident in the French colonies be recognized as valid". He added that "the refusal of the French authorities in Marseilles to provide the list of Italian citizens included in the call-up registers had created a very unfavourable impression, in particular as this was a public record".

In reply to Menabrea's proposal that the consular officials in the French colonies be invested with special powers of attorney by the central government, Crispi remarked that they were already invested with such powers by Italian law, and that therefore their authentications carried full legal power, and was therefore even more valid than the purely administrative authority wielded by central government officers. "If it is the case that the French government" — the dispatch continued — "and the Council of State have taken no notice of this peremptory argument, then it is clearly the case that they have made up their minds as to how they intend to act, and I reserve doubts as to whether Your Excellency's efforts will prove successful". Crispi's note concluded with an exhortation that all means, including Italian welfare societies, should be mobilised in order to assist those involved in procuring the requisite documents in time to make the obligatory declarations of citizenship or its rejection.⁴²

Somewhat resentfully, Menabrea replied almost immediately and again supported the solution which the French government had proposed and which he had provisionally accepted, although he did admit that the inclusion of the Embassy's endorsement on consular documents originating from distant parts did give rise to delays and inconvenience. For this reason he had again made a verbal protest to Ribot, but he doubted whether any solution was really possible in view of the French government's need to find some way of overcoming the consequences of a declining population. This, he argued, was the reason why the French were unwilling to provide the requested list of Italian nationals in the army call-up records.⁴³

It should also be remembered that in addition to the Italians resident in French colonies there were many others who had emigrated to more

⁴² AEI: Crispi to Menabrea, 28th July, D. 27232. The Minister of the Interior instructed the Prefects to advertise the French law: Interior to For. Min., 12th June, L. 11900/136916. The Consul in Paris drew attention to the need to encourage Italian emigrants to register on the Consular books within three months: Consul to the For. Min., 26th June, R. 177. There was even a proposal to publish details of the French legislation on citizenship in Italian passports.

⁴³ AEI: Menabrea to Crispi, 3rd August, R. 658.

distant places, north and south America and beyond, where legislative requirements were even more severe than in France. In many countries, for example, local citizenship was acquired automatically at birth. And while Crispi was attempting to exploit a rather unclear judgement made by the Council of State, the French High Court issued a much more severe judgement. This interpreted clause 8 of the new law in such a way as to rule that French nationality was automatically attributed to the son of a mother who had been born in France even when the father was not French born — meaning that the offspring of mixed marriages automatically acquired French nationality.

Even the French authorities saw this ruling as excessive, and the law of 22nd July 1893 modified the situation by conceding to the son of a French born mother and a foreign father one year's grace, after reaching maturity, in which to opt for the nationality of his preference.

How many Italian immigrants accepted French nationality? The best information on this comes from the Torielli report, and the figures used were those contained in the annual reports made by the French Minister of Justice on the application of the law of 1889. In 1889 the number was 1,001 (438 of which in Algeria), in 1890 1,627 (318 in Algeria), 1891 956 (none in Algeria), and in 1892 1,331 (with 363 of these in Algeria. These figures hide the fact, however, that many children under age also received French citizenship by virtue of the naturalization of their fathers — we have only one figure for this, which suggests 1,700 instances of this nature during the first four years of the law's operation.

As they stand the figures would not seem to be overwhelming and may well need further examination. But the statistics do indicate two incontrovertible facts. The rate of naturalizations increased in direct proportion to the threat of war between the two countries. Secondly, they formed a much higher percentage than those of the other foreign colonies in France, the Belgians, Swiss and Germans. While the Italians constituted some 25% of the foreign population, they also accounted for 35% of the naturalizations, the majority of which resulted simply from failure to comply with the procedures for opting out and preserving Italian nationality. "There can be little doubt" — observed Torielli — "that the above mentioned disproportion can only reflect a deplorable lack of patriotic feeling amongst the Italians in France".

If the French statistics may be questionable, this is not the case for those provided by the Italian consulates regarding the process of opting to preserve Italian citizenship. The Embassy in Paris, as we have seen, was obliged to issue an authenticating certificate for each individual who opted in this way. From Torielli's report we can see that such optings amounted

to less than 400 in the entire decade 1889-98, including the French colonies. In the same period 10,394 Italians were naturalized, and 1297 Italians requested French naturalization. I am happy to let the sociologists explain the phenomenon by means of some model or other device. But it seems clear that at least two conclusions may be drawn from all this. First, Crispi's attempts to protect Italian emigrants in France were a failure. Secondly, his policy of hostility towards France had the effect of encouraging the assimilation of the Italians resident north of the Alps.