

## SOCIETY TODAY

Giuseppe Alberto Bayutti is an important figure in Australian society though not that many Australians know it. He can claim that stature because he is a very important man in Italian-Australian society. And Gough Whitlam knows that. He is pleased to call Bayutti Jim.

In March 1974, Bayutti laid it right on Prime Minister Whitlam. At a public meeting Bayutti told Whitlam:

"For our part, we merely want to belong to a united community and to be able to serve it.

"Although the capacity to serve in the highest places exists, together with an unselfish willingness to be available, it is not always apparent that our services are welcomed in other than mediocre roles."

Six months later, in October, Whitlam rang Bayutti and said: "I would like you to go on the board of Qantas."

Astonished, Bayutti said: "Why?"

Bayutti is lunching with friends at the APLA Club, Lichfield, which is a depressed area of Sydney, four miles west of the city.

The club, as Sydney poker machine clubs tend to be, is something of a palace, but lacks the full honor of such a protogonist as the St George Leagues Club.

It is situated on the water on the south side of the Harbour and commands a nice view of the small boats anchored in Iron Cove. This view is, however, obscured by ranks of poker machines, the architect judging, no doubt rightly, that turnover was more essential to the club than aesthetic considerations.

Bayutti moves easily through the foyer and down the stairs to the lower dining room, exchanging an hello here and shaking hands there.

He answers with equal alacrity to Mr Bayutti, Jim, Giuseppe, and padrone, an Italian word that means boss, or master.

Bayutti is a man of medium height, but thick set, running to a second class. His face is a plump, smooth olive; there is a suspicion of a part on the left of his thick, grey-black hair.

### Could pass for a film star

Fixed down a bit, he could pass for one of those romantic Italian film stars, such as Mr Romano Battaglia, the old anarchist who sang Che Sera Sera in that long-forgotten piece of music.

On the third finger of his left hand, Bayutti wears a ring consisting of a large number of pieces of glass set into a band of white gold.

The ring belonged to his father, who died in Udine in 1930, when Bayutti was seven, as a result of which for the next 20 years, he rarely got outside a good meal. Which may be a reason why he is so fond of Australia.

Bayutti is an honest name in Udine (near the Austrian border) and in the cemetery there, where the first Bayutti appears in 1355. They had land and property until their fortunes were much diminished by the fact that Giacomo's grandfather had 18 children, which caused some splitting of the property.

Nevertheless, Bayutti got himself through the engineering course at the University of Turin, and fought on the Russian front with the Alpine troops, and came to Australia in a two-year contract to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme in 1949.

Bayutti is by way of being a dresser, but, like Bonaparte, and unlike the rest of us, he has the capacity to calculate precisely how to make his dress come to pass.

For example, while Bayutti will tell you that the Italian is not a good Catholic but not a bad Christian, he also says: if people want to go to Mass, they must first have a church.

Thus, when he was in Cooma in 1949, in charge of some 500 migrants on the Snowy scheme, he not only built a church, but also brought out a priest from Italy, much to the disgust of the local priest.

Again, when he was in charge of more men building an oil refinery on the sandy wastes of Keruel five years later, he

## Jim Bayutti: he's not on the Qantas board just to help sell tickets to New Australians

means of taking their minds off their loneliness and depression, he founded the Associazione Polisportiva Italo-Australiana (APLA), which mouthful means the Italian-Australian All Sports Association.

It is at the temple of this association that we are now about to eat. It is a matter of pride for Bayutti that it was officially opened by Sir Robert Menzies in the only such act of that politician's career.

And you again, in 1957, untroubled by what he judged to be the half-dodgy approach of the existing Soccer administration, he took half a dozen teams out and started his own Soccer Federation.

In those days, they called him, as sports writers will, the sunny peat of Soccer, but they also say he slowed down in later years, at least to the extent of giving up his practice of issuing sports editorials to clubs.

But the dark brown eyes flash with a

spark of the existing directors. In January 1971, La Fiamma carried a manifesto seeking an extraordinary general meeting. The following month the Companies Office moved in to scrutinise the books.

About 2000 packed the extraordinary general meeting held in April 1971. The first vote, for a chairman of the meeting, passed which way the wind was blowing in Lichfield: Bayutti got 88 per cent of the vote.

The vote to dissolve the existing committee was 1503-261; Bayutti and four others were appointed to form a caretaker committee.

In December of that year, a former treasurer of the club was charged with having corruptly received money from Nut & Muddle, the poker machine manufacturer. He was convicted and given a four months' suspended jail sentence and fined \$350.

In the three years since Bayutti's return,

which appears to be of economic interest to those present, and the lunch concludes with all in high good humour.

Trundling up to the ground floor, Bayutti comes on a group of 22 people sitting round a large table and, looking down that sweet champagne, much in demand on festive occasions in those parts, called anti-spirits.

This is La Fiamma's week, having their Christmas treat, and all present appear to be carrying on in the most amicable manner.

They greet Bayutti with roars of approval, make room for him at the table, and pour him a glass of the sweet stuff.

He raises the glass, and cries: "On to il

Globo!"

"Il Globo!" they respond, shouting.

Bayutti introduces us to Dr (of Laws) Erasmo Costanza, editor of the paper. Costanza, a tall man going grey, with thick lenses, is a journalist of the old school, which is to say he has firm in his belly.

It emerges that Bayutti and a couple of others have bought Costanza out of La Fiamma, but will keep him on as editor.

La Fiamma is not a journal to be sneered at; it sells 35,000 copies twice a week, which gives it a readership probably something like that of the Sydney Bulletin.

Il Globo is the Melbourne Italian-language newspaper. Thus, a current Bayutti dream begins to take shape: a national Italian-language paper.

Aha, I reflect, for what reason does Bayutti, who, with his head on his heart, will tell you he does not play politics, want a national Italian newspaper?

### Time has come for some English

Well, he says, the time has come for some papers of La Fiamma to be written in English as well as Italian, and there are enough Italian-Australians around almost to support a national daily. This sort of operation needs money, which Bayutti and his friends will supply.

And what of the direction of the paper? "A newspaper, as you know, must be a commercial proposition. Costanza is at times a little left; we will move closer to the centre, but Costanza will still be in charge."

He also says he goes down to Rome to get two or three good journalists there to string for the paper, so it will get better Italian news.

"While I am there," he says, "I will

## Billy McMahon was nervous. I told him: 'There'll be no trouble. I decide who's booted'

little of the old fire when recent events in the club are mentioned.

After Bayutti had passed on to other endeavors, the direction of the club, it seems, took on a certain course.

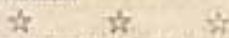
Tom Magnifico, a man not much more than five feet in height, but whose lack of inches and one hand did not prevent him from becoming a champion wrestler and club honoree, is said to have detected an irregularity in 1970.

Fees that moment events moved swiftly and with the passion typical of Italian-Australian affairs.

The Italian language newspaper, La Fiamma (The Flame) topped a couple of writs each of \$250,000 from the club; the annual meeting of November 1970 was adjourned without the financial statement being presented; and Bayutti was called back.

It seems that he organised a patch

membership has climbed to 12,000, splitting about half and half Italian-born and Australian-born, but, as Bayutti insists, two-thirds of the Italians are naturalised, and so 10,000 of the club members are in fact Australians.



Although both sides, as they did with Eisenhower, have pressed him to stand in their interest for Parliament, Bayutti professes no political affiliations, but he will say that only two Australian Prime Ministers have understood migrants: John Gorton and Gough Whitlam.

"Billy McMahon came late before the 1972 election," he says, "and he was nervous; thought they might boot him. I told him: 'I decide who gets booted at APLA; there will be no trouble.'"

After politics, the talk turns to other matters, including the affair Mezzalana.

have a good look at the Holy Year, so our readers will know whether it is just a commercial thing, or fair dinkum."

I decided that La Fiamma is still in good hands.

And politics?

"Not me, no. But the time has come to launch young people in politics."

In another part of the conversation, he mentions, without any particular emphasis, that, of the ethnic groups, Italians and Greeks together amount to 1.3 million, and adds: "This is 10 per cent of the vote, if we want to go into politics."

Bayutti plans to be in Rome while Whitlam is there, to put the journalists on the right track, get them introductions to senior Italians, and so forth.

Bayutti says: "The migrant is a wake-up to politics; I think he will vote for the man, not the party."

If that's the case, for the migrant there is only one man in it. Bayutti remarks with some wonder: "I have known Whitlam for 16 years. Even when he was nothing, just a backbencher, he was sending me telegrams about the Soccer."

Perhaps a more accurate way to put it, I reflect, is that Whitlam has made it his business to know Bayutti for 16 years, and in this context I recall that Neal and I dined again at Warwick Farm at 1.30 am last May 19.

By that time, it had emerged that Whitlam might yet lose the election, and most of the party voters had gone for the pacific button and drifted off in a blur funk.

But when Whitlam finally emerged from his computer-filled bunker he was immediately surrounded by a horde of people, mostly post-shaped in contour and idolatrous in manner, and the accents in which they chattered as they pressed in on the great man were not Australian in derivation.

Thus, while Whitlam's current cover-laps around Europe may be to the apex of the Australian press, little more than an opportunity to express malice — the top is a house of a different colour to the migrant.

"In the ethnic press, we are taking this job very seriously," says Bayutti. "The Italian President was on here in 1967; you can't tell me that an Australian Prime Minister before Whitlam had the time to attend the *complotto*."

## Whitlam supporters

Whitlam is no doubt getting yards of laudatory space in the ethnic press, and it suddenly occurs to me that the next election may not be altogether the snack for Scadden, or whoever is the then leader, that it seemed to be.

Bayutti climbs into the driving seat of his bottle green, two-door, automatic Mercedes 350 SLC. The vehicle is equipped with a dictation machine and a device for playing stereo cassettes.

He drives with casual ease, his right hand dangling from the top of the wheel, a Rothmans filter between the first and second fingers, and his left hand resting on the automatic change.

He slips a cassette into the slot, and a leaner named Franco Corbelli, whom Bayutti judges to be better than Carnos, lets drive with something out of Toss, while he slides through back streets across Sydney and down to Kingsford.

This is a place one tends to think of as a rather divy industrial suburb, but Bayutti's home is on the bench, or western, side of Tumball Avenue.

This means that all that impedes his view from the rear of the house are several acres of emerald fairways dotted with trees of the Australian Golf Club.

Bayutti assesses the view: "I am not rich. I am not poor, certainly, but not rich. I am comfortable."

I suppose comfortable is as good a word as any. The house is built on the side of a cliff. It's L-shaped, with the sleeping quarters on the long leg jutting towards the golf course.

The entrance from Tumball Avenue leads into a high-roofed area which contains a sunken sitting-room, and a raised dining area.

The rear wall is entirely glass with a view out over the links, and beyond the wall a wide patio. Below is a large swimming pool, blue-tiled at the bottom.

The neighbours on either side also have swimming pools. It's late in the afternoon and nobody is on the course, but someone



Giacomo Bayutti . . . patrono to the Italian community.

has been active that day. In the bottom of the pool, near the pier, lies a golf ball.

Studying the lie of the course, as it runs up to what Bayutti thinks may be the ninth hole, I judge it would take a drive of truly heroic loft and slice to get a ball into the pool. Bayutti says it happens all the time.

Bayutti does not play golf but discloses that he has an interest in cricket.

"Custanzo laughs at cricket," he says. "I like it. I go to the Test match. My son went to Wesley College. He was the wicket-keeper and he opened the batting. He explained the law rule to me."

He then comes up with a variation of the Duke of Wellington's fiction about the playing fields of Eton: "The English are successful at winning wars because they play cricket: you must have nerves of steel to stay at the crease for three or four hours."

Well, that may be. I'd have thought it was just perverse of them.

We come back in and fall down on the lush, brocade of long divans set at right angles. The room is cool and dim: above us the ceiling towers up into the distance.

Mrs Bayutti emerges, and the dim,

pretty woman with dark red hair whom he first met at a CUSA dance in Sydney in 1952.

Giacomo was then 23 and Rosita Ari was 21, and her mother, who came to Australia in 1926, was there as shop-crook. But Bayutti knew all movements of that particular flower, and went and fetched a glass of orange for the mother before leading Rosita on to the dance floor.

After they were married, Bayutti and his wife went into business. He got first one competitor and one shovel, and then another of each, and so on, and thus built up Jim Bayutti Contractors, which has done earth-moving work at Mary Kathleen and the Opera House, and employs about 40 people.

Bayutti also has interests in a brick-works and a firm of engineering consultants.

They have two children: Paul, 20, doing Economics at Macquarie; and Louise, 18, who hopes to do Fine Arts at Sydney.

He decimates a little on corruption in Italy, and the dangers of communism, and feels that things might have been better

there if they'd taken a firmer line with the communist years ago.

However, he inclines to the view that the innate good sense of Australians will save us from the worst excesses of communism here, a view shared, I imagine by most Australians, but not, of course, by some politicians.

For his Christmas Eve dinner at the APLA Club, Bayutti seats 13, including three fellow directors, and his son, who is executing an absolutely smashing performance as Janet, who is appearing at a pantomime in the City.

The six rose and the mineral water make another appearance, but there is not a lot of it, Midnight Mass being later on the program.

I get by lamplightly on oysters, salted herring, which is firm and chewy and stiff, and an ice.

A late arrival is Mr Maurer Timb, the well-known permanent head. A distinguished-looking man with silver-grey hair, he is secretary of Mr Fred Daly's Department of Services and Property.

Timb is a director of the club (they seem to be either of Italian or Irish

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