

14th November 1990

The Hon. M. Goldsmith
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney, 2000

Dear Madam,

It seems, as a result of recent developments leading up to a review of language teaching in Australia, that the Federal Government is considering relegating the teaching of the Italian language to a low priority role. This consideration is causing great concern within the Italian Community.

It may be said that no firm decision has been taken yet; nonetheless, the policy endorsed by the Queensland Government and the refusal of the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon J. Dawkins, to deny these rumours, have reinforced the fear that the study of the Italian language is going to be penalised.

The members of the Italian Special Branch want you to know that there exists in the Community a strong sense of anxiety and indignation against this proposal by the Federal Government.

This mood has prompted *Mamma Lena* and the A. P. I. A. Club Ladies Committee to promote a nation-wide petition. This petition has already been signed by tens of thousands of citizens.

We believe that the study of the Italian language allows for the realization of a number of educational and cultural objectives that go well beyond an immediate pragmatic need, and thoroughly fulfills the functions normally required from a foreign language:

* It is one of the most widely spoken languages in Australia, second only to English. It is easily understood by Spanish speaking Communities and by a number of refugees from Eastern Europe who have experienced in the past political asylum in Italy before moving on to Australia.

Furthermore, according to recent information provided by Co. As. It., 39,729 young people, in Sydney alone, are studying Italian at primary schools level. In Victoria there are: 82,921 pupils studying Italian at primary level and 41,093 pupils at secondary level. In total, more than 200,000 young students in our schools are presently participating in Italian programs of one kind or another.

* It is indispensable in terms of humanistic cultural development; probably the most important one in terms of Western Civilization. It is the language of a Community that has maintained strong cohesive elements as family and Church, and hence has had a less traumatic immigration experience than any other group in Australia.

The Italian one is a Community that has not created a host of social problems, has not brought to Australia contrasts or divisions, indeed, it has culturally enriched this land of ours, bringing new vitality to our civic life, and adding to it a greater variety of now mutually shared cultural values.

* It is also the language of the fifth largest economy of the Western World. Italy, today, has consistent and growing economic and cultural relations with Australia. Indeed, only recently the Italian and the Australian Governments have signed a Cultural Agreement, whereby the Italian Government is committed to supporting the teaching of the Italian language in Australia.

We can easily say then, that the Italian language embodies and transmits a cultural ideology deeply rooted in the European way of life. And if with education we are aiming to help all youth become knowledgeable, sociable and responsible, our priorities cannot be dictated only by economic reasons. Today more than ever humanistic knowledge is a positive vehicle in reconciling the competing interests of modern life. Thus, in this context, it acquires paramount importance. The quest for greater achievement must be a quest for economic well-being as well as a striving for self-fulfillment and intellectual growth.

There is considerable advantage in gaining a perspective on the current scene through understanding our heritage. We believe that a study of the history of our cultural background enables us to reappraise more carefully those forces from the past which are still at work in the present, and to solve more successfully some of the crucial problems that confront our society in this changing world.

Consequently, the Italian language with its inextricable ties with the Arts and the European Renaissance cannot be considered to be of secondary importance in the education of our youth.

In short, Italian culture harmonises with Australian culture and complements it. Therefore, we affirm that it is essential not only to maintain the present level of the teaching of the Italian language but to support its continued growth.

Having demonstrated the importance of the Italian language in education and in our everyday life, the members of the Italian Special Branch cannot understand the motives that could justify downgrading it, and are equally concerned by the fact that the Liberal Party has not made political mileage on this matter.

We think that the issue has the power to unite the entire Community, and in seeking your support we can confidently assure you that the Italian Community will be grateful to you and to the Liberal Party in your supporting, with conviction, this cause.

Thanking you for your kind attention to this letter, I remain,

Yours sincerely

Italy Mazzola

On behalf of the I. S. B.