

# ANTICLERICAL TENDENCIES AMONG FRIULIAN-CANADIAN ANTIFASCISTS

Olga Zorzi Pugliese\*

The Friulian antifascists in Canada during the 1920s-1930s displayed strong anticlerical leanings, because of the political ideologies that they espoused, or as a result of personal experiences. Many were also idealistic proponents of social justice. The evidence presented here is from their direct testimony (interviews, letters), information provided by family members, and their death notices published in local newspapers.

*Le tendenze anticlericali degli antifascisti friulano-canadesi*

Gli antifascisti friulani in Canada negli anni Venti e Trenta tendevano ad essere fortemente anticlericali, a causa delle ideologie politiche o delle esperienze personali. Molti erano anche fautori idealisti di giustizia sociale. Le prove presentate in questa sede derivano dalla loro testimonianza diretta (interviste, lettere), dai dati forniti dalle famiglie e dai necrologi apparsi sui giornali locali.

## Introduction

The Friulian antifascists in Canada during the 1920s and 1930s tended to have strong anticlerical leanings. Born and raised as Roman Catholics in Friuli, many eventually abandoned this tradition, chose to live outside the Church, rejecting marriage – even if only temporarily – and eliminating church rites for their children. These anticlerical leanings were often passed on to their descendants thus establishing new family traditions – in the Protestant faith, in many cases, or in a form of non-religiosity if not atheism. This anticlerical tendency may have been part of the political ideologies that some Friulian antifascists espoused, such as anarchism or communism, or it could have been based on unpleasant personal experiences they had had in their youth in Italy or in their subsequent years in Canada. The alliance of the Church of Rome with the fascist government in Italy was another undeniable factor contributing to the rejection, causing anticlericalism to accompany disdain for the old world order and fascist politics.

\* University of Toronto, Canada.

Nevertheless, these decidedly negative sentiments were usually counterbalanced by an equally strong idealism with respect to human freedom and social justice. One might even say that the antifascists replaced their traditional Church-dominated upbringing with a fundamental form of basic Christian teachings.

In the 40 odd individuals from the 1920s and 1930s in Canada that are the subject of my ongoing research, there is clear evidence of pronounced anticlerical views. Brief profiles of some of the persons under examination have appeared in my earlier articles (“Antifascisti friulani in Canada nel periodo interbellico”; “Antifascisti friulani in Canada negli anni venti e trenta”), and a more complete discussion of these individuals with an indication of their political activities is reserved for a book-length publication in preparation. The present paper instead focusses exclusively on their attitudes toward religion. Documentation for the assessment of these attitudes comes from the Casellario Politico Centrale (CPC) files in the State Archive in Rome for those antifascists who were officially blacklisted, from direct testimonies (even interviews) with some of the activists themselves and/or their families and descendants, and also from a survey of their relationship (existent or non-existent) with organized religion at the time of their deaths. The type of funeral organized at their passing often indicated a distancing from the Catholic Church, and important data in this connection is derived from their obituaries published in local newspapers.

First the direct testimony, oral and written, of the antifascists themselves who expressed anticlerical views.

### **Attilio Bortolotti, Anarchist Rebel, and Antifascist Clashes**

The anarchist Attilio Bortolotti (Codroipo, Udine 1903 - Toronto 1995), popularly known as Art Bartell, was interviewed many times during his lifetime<sup>1</sup>. The interview of particular interest for this discussion is the one audio-recorded by Dr. Angelo Principe in the mid-1970s and transcribed in my 2013 article. While other interviews, previously published, appear to have been edited, even translated, and are readily available to researchers only in their written form, the Principe recording generously lent to me by the interviewer preserves the words as spoken by Bortolotti, his tone of voice, emphasis and even the occasional outburst of laughter. In this aural/textual document Bortolotti narrates how, in his youth before emigrating to Canada in 1920, he had rebelled against the Church and was opposed to war, having seen at firsthand the ravages of

<sup>1</sup> On Bortolotti see CPC *busta* 772 and bibliographical references contained in Pugliese, “Antifascisti friulani in Canada nel periodo interbellico” (2013).

World War I in Friuli. Having converted to anarchism in the new world in 1922 during protests that he joined in Michigan over the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, he also took part in demonstrations in Windsor, Ontario against the Italian consular officials in 1929. During the ‘near-riots’, as described in the local newspaper (*Windsor Daily Star*, 23 September 1929), the protesters denounced Mussolini, the Italian monarchy, and the Church. In the interview given later in life to Principe, Bortolotti decries the Church’s alliance with Canadian fascists in Canada too<sup>2</sup>. In this interview, in addition to recounting the episodes of antifascist demonstrations, he also explains how the Windsor anarchists carried out charitable activities, collecting funds to help those who were ill or in need (Pugliese. “Antifascisti friulani nel periodo interbellico”: 169-170), and points out that the number of fascists to be found among the Friulani in Canada was actually very low (172). In connection with events in Toronto, where Bortolotti had moved in late 1929, he speaks about a pedophile priest who had molested children at the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, which he sarcastically calls not Santa Maria degli Angeli but Santa Maria dei Tori, noting how the culprit had fled from the parish and how he, Bortolotti, had actually met one of the young victims who complained about her treatment at the hands of the priest (178). At the end of the Principe interview, Bortolotti makes one last anticlerical remark concerning Nicola Giacotti (Dimani, Catanzaro 1896 - Toronto area 1958), the leader of the socialist Circolo Mazzini of Toronto whom he describes as «un uomo onestissimo» but «troppo religioso» (183). In spite of Bortolotti’s characterization of him, Giacotti was not given a Catholic mass at his death<sup>3</sup>, and he was buried in Prospect Cemetery, a Christian but non-Catholic resting place<sup>4</sup>, chosen by other Toronto antifascists as well.

### **Anthony Mark Nimis and His Anticlerical Letter**

Across the country in the province of Alberta strong anticlerical sentiments were expressed by a Friulan antifascist in Edmonton, named Marco Antonio (Anthony Mark) Nimis (Nimis, Udine 1900 - Edmonton, Alberta 1984)<sup>5</sup>, in a letter he wrote in 1937 that was intercepted by the Italian authorities. Ironi-

<sup>2</sup> «i fascisti [...] hanno avuto subito l’appoggio della chiesa Cattolica» and «i preti [...] affiancavano il fascismo». Pugliese. “Antifascisti... nel periodo interbellico”: 165.

<sup>3</sup> Obituary of Nicola Giacotti.

<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank Nellie Pellegrini Cressatti for information on this cemetery.

<sup>5</sup> See CPC busta 3543 and profile in Pugliese. “Antifascisti... anni venti e trenta”: 75-79. Much information was provided by daughter Rosita Nimis Newberry during telephone calls on 8 April 2013 and 27 May 2013.

cally, this person, unlike Bortolotti and many of the other figures being studied, was not particularly engaged politically and, according to the testimony of family and friends, had no party affiliation. His rather vitriolic family letter was practically the sole reason for his being blacklisted by the Italian fascist government.

In the fascist government files (CPC *busta* 3543), where he is registered, Nimis is said to have expressed socialist ideas in Italy but without being involved in any propaganda or proselytizing<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, because of the objectionable letter that they censored, the Italian authorities placed him on the list for border search ('*rubrica frontiera*' '*per perquisire e segnalare*'<sup>7</sup>) on 17 March 1942. As his daughter has recounted, Nimis had served in the Italian army in World War I, more precisely in the 8<sup>th</sup> regiment of the *alpini*. Captured by the Austrians he managed to escape to Paris where he remained for several years. After returning to Friuli he decided to emigrate. My research indicates that, while still unmarried, he arrived in Canada in 1926 (not in 1930 as stated in the CPC), with the declared intention, probably not an accurate one, of farming. He had an older brother Giuseppe in Lovett, a mining area in northern Alberta. Born in 1884, his brother had arrived in North America in 1909. After having worked as a miner for the company that had sponsored his trip, Antonio moved to Edmonton where, in 1929, he met and married a young Friulian from Pozzo di Codroipo, Emilia Segatto, who had arrived in Canada with her mother and sister to join her father Giosuè who had first immigrated to Canada in 1913. In Edmonton Antonio Nimis worked in various fields, always preserving Italian and Friulian traditions in his home and passing them on to his two daughters. According to the Edmonton voters' lists for 1949 and 1953, he worked as a painter/plasterer and later in 1958 and 1965, he is listed as being employed by the steel company, Stelco, as his daughter has confirmed. She has also described her father as an elegant and lively man, who even had some natural artistic talent that was displayed in the wood and cement sculptures he created, in spite of having had no formal art training. Nimis was also known for his good works, helping his compatriots to build their houses in Canada, and even hosting in his home the wedding celebrations of newly arrived immigrants

<sup>6</sup> Copy of the report sent by the Prefecture of Udine to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome on 7 October 1937 reads: «in patria professò idee socialiste senza però svolgere propaganda». The report originating in Winnipeg in 1938 states that Nimis «non è iscritto a quel Fascio, ma [...] ha sempre tenuto buona condotta morale e politica» (s.p.).

<sup>7</sup> The document issued by the Ministry on 13 April 1938 includes the request to «fare iscrivere l'individuo in oggetto nella rubrica di frontiera» (s.p.).

In spite of the fact that Nimis was not a member of any political party, he was investigated by the Italian fascist authorities who had to acknowledge that his moral and political conduct had always been 'good'. Nevertheless, according to his daughter, he did have very firm views and expressed them in a frank manner, his ideas being fundamentally anticlerical and antifascist, as the confiscated letter demonstrates.

The letter opens with conventional phrases, commenting on the distance separating the writer from his relatives and the nostalgia felt because of that separation, and then includes the joyous announcement of the birth of his daughter. The tone becomes much more polemical, however, when Antonio states how negative the opinions abroad of the fascist government of Italy are and when he expresses his own criticism of Mussolini and the Church. He denounces the Italian government that has taken away freedom from its people, who are suffering in extreme poverty. He launches a vehement attack against the actions of priests and physicians, that is, the powerful persons who were not always averse to exploiting the poor in their towns, and goes on to narrate a personal experience that had impacted him greatly. After sending a remittance to his mother – money that he had earned carrying out what he calls the worst job in the world down in the mine, he was horrified to learn that she had used the funds to have a mass said by the priest.

The letter, censored by the authorities, was not forwarded to the addressee but was placed in Nimis's file in the CPC. Rather than the original, though, what we find in the Rome archive is a typewritten transcription prepared by the officials. It contains typographical errors and some inaccuracies as well, due possibly to haste or to the difficulty encountered by the officials in trying to decipher the hand and wording of the letter written by a person with little education, as was the norm. The authorities did identify the addressee as Antonio's sister-in-law, Luigia Nimis, also said to be «of good moral and political conduct»<sup>8</sup>. What follows is a reproduction of the transcription of the letter dated 17 July 1937, with some obvious errors corrected, and capitalization and accents modernized. More significant modifications or unclear passages are noted in parenthesis or in the notes. While some references to family matters are omitted, the letter is cited here almost in its entirety so as to illustrate not only the personal sentiments felt by a migrant far from his Friulian place of origin, but also the strong views on politics and religion shared by many of his compatriots in Canada in this period.

<sup>8</sup> «di buona condotta morale e politica». Copy of the report sent by the Prefecture of Udine to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome on 7 October 1937.

Cognata carissima,

Questi giorni proprio mi decisi a rispondere alla tua ricevuta in data di giugno fui molto soddisfatto nel ricevere vostre notizie. Anzi ogniqualvolta riceviamo un vostro scritto ci fa del piacere perché altre relazioni [= parenti; calco dall'inglese] fuori di voi altri e dei parenti di mia moglie non ne abbiamo dunque immaginate voi stessi che ci fa piacere o no. Ora passiamo ai differenti argomenti. Fui molto contento di sentire, che per il presente siete sani pure qui per il momento non si può lamentare. Anzi ora che sarà un mese e mezzo abbiamo avuto alla luce una piccola ragazzina che ci a da veggiare abbastanza. Ho piacere pure che avete ricevuti i due scudi e mi dispiace di non poter far di più, che vo[r]à<sup>9</sup> dire che ogni qualvolta mi verà l'occasione di poter fare qualcosa non mancherò di ricordarmi di voi altri. Speriamo che per l'avvenire si cambieranno pure qui i tempi. Ho inteso quali terribili tempi sono colà non solo di voi altri ma di italiani che sono ritornati di colà non tanto fa e mi raccontarono delle cose che mi fecero della grande impressione in via delle condizioni che la povera gente viene oppressa a tal modo per via di tasse [pre]diali<sup>10</sup> spese truffe e ogni qualità di ristrettezze che sul capo dell'umanità possa cascare. Quel porco governaccio vergognoso lui e quella banda di briganti di pretacci uniti assieme che dominano l'umanità ancora di centinaia di anni fa indietro. Non si vergognano di far vivere 30 milioni di povera gente scalza affamata oppressa schiava tassata in tutte le vie e dominata con le più barbarie [sic] qualità che un governo possa usare. Qui sui giornali e per tutto il mondo in giorno d'oggi predice [sic] la schiavitù e la fame e la vergogna che esiste nel regime fascista. Lera male ahi tempi che mi trovavo colà ma il giorno dogi con [forse son] guai quando mai la popolazione italiana potrà avere la libertà del libero cittadino!!! Mai!!!!!! Ma si ricorderanno che in 10 milioni di italiani sparsi per il mondo non ne tengono e non ne terranno simpatie di quella bella Italia fatto solo per i ricchi per i pretaci e per la gente che non zappa. Ma vi giuro che una persona qui prendendo il sussidio del governo sta più bene e vive più bene e più pulito e contento che la famiglia dei pauluns di val o dei cosguati<sup>11</sup> nostri cusini che non vivono altro che di vergis e fasui sebbene che anno i miglioni alla banca. Ora il mondo dovrebbe essere cambiato volgio dire chi lavora dovrebbe avere i suoi diritti e non solo padroni di pagar tasse e mantenere quei porchi pretaci e signoracci che se la sbafano sopra le spalle daltrui. Io al giorno dogi se fossi stato colà male avrei finito i miei giorni. Ma pure [più] male l'avrebbe passa[t]a<sup>12</sup> qualcuno perché fin da giovinetto o cominciato a capire che non lavorano solo per la familiaria ma per tanti altri che neanche conoscemo. Così faccio per dirti specialmente a te Giacomo. In via di quel di miseria che tengo colà

<sup>9</sup> The typewritten transcription incorrectly reads *voia*.

<sup>10</sup> Sincere thanks go to Professor Rienzo Pellegrini of the Università degli Studi of Trieste for having corrected and explained the term (misunderstood and misread by the officials as *fridiali*), which signified the heavy taxes imposed on land. Professor Pellegrini has made other much appreciated corrections in the transcription included here.

<sup>11</sup> These are perhaps the nicknames of families.

<sup>12</sup> The 'officials' inaccurate (and nonsensical) transcription reads *fin male l'avrebbe passara*.

ti dico la verità tro [sic] per via di voi. I...<sup>13</sup> giornali di tutto il mondo. La gente che viene di là sono ta[n]to disgu[s]tato che quel govern[o] là più non ci do più credito a ciò ti volgia dire che per m[e] sarebbe piacere se la mia parte fosse e ti desse dell'uso frutto non per me perché me ne rangio qui che pu[r]troppo vedi che ancora non ti ho chiesto un risultato ma volgio dire che per te stesso ti rendesse dell'uso frutto sufficiente perché tu potessi campare. Così tu colà bensì lo sai meglio di me se potrai s[b]arcare il lunario e tirar avanti bene, se tu sarai imbrogliato a tenerla pulita non posso altro che dirti. Lascia che vada all'inferno tutto poi quando che il governaccio si sarà impadronito manderà il signor Monsignor Beniamino a lavorar la terra oppure lasci[a] che la sbattono nel culo lori quei animale! Che [forse *Cb'è*] quanto penso io. In Italia tutti quelli che posedino, specialmente come siamo noi piccole proprietà celabiamo pagate al governo 100 volte. Allora ditemi voialtri che affetto a d'[a]vere il cristiano di coltivare terra in Italia? No, mai e ma[i] se tutti fossero stati come me! Tanta gente che non a mai lavorato, avrebbe avuto e avrebbe dandar a lavorare. Ora credo che mi sono spiegato abbastanza. Solo o a diven[ir]e ancora o mai. Quando che la povera vecchia era ancora in vita io ci inviai cinque scudi per un regalo essa mi rispose che aveva fatto dire una bella messa per le anime del purgatorio, poi non so quanto aveva speso. Io quando sento questo immaginatevi quanto mi a piaciuto e ci scrissi che siccome io lavorare in una miniera quì sotto il più duro lavoro che esiste al mondo e i miei sudori andare in mani a quei vigliacchi e ladri che criminali di preti che non cerc[an] altro che di approfittarsi de[l] sudore e delle sposine altrui?... [puntini di sospensione o perché il trascrittore omise qualcosa o perché lo scrivente stesso alludeva ad altri misfatti indicibili dei preti] Alla povera defunta ci scrissi non più un soldo già che così va l'affare. [...]<sup>14</sup>. Ora termino e datevi coraggio e se potete scappare fuori di quella bella Patria che io lamo tanto e credete[m] Tony e molgie che se farò qualcosa non mi dimenticherò mai. Abbiatemi i più miglio[r]i saluti e vi auguriamo tanto bene e piccoli uniti<sup>15</sup>.

The negative comments on fascist Italy expressed in the letter are highlighted by the government officials with underlining. They reflect, as the writer acknowledges, what he had read in the newspapers or heard in Canada, along with the comments of townsfolk who had returned from Italy, whereas his anticlericalism seems to have stemmed from his own experiences in his hometown, experiences that his daughter was able to confirm when she visited Italy for the first time. Nevertheless, after his death, which occurred on 23 June 1984, as his obituary indicates<sup>16</sup>, Antonio Nimis was given a Catholic mass in a Catholic church and then buried in the Catholic cemetery of Holy Cross in Edmonton.

<sup>13</sup> The government transcribers inserted points of suspension, probably because unable to decipher the original hand.

<sup>14</sup> The letter continues with references to other members of the family.

<sup>15</sup> More news about the family follows.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Nimis obituary, 23 June 1984.



### Friulian Antifascists in Windsor and Toronto, Ontario

On the other hand, most of the large group of Friulian antifascists who were active in Windsor, Ontario, especially the original members of the Centro di Cultura, who, as family members have confirmed, had strong anticlerical views and were engaged politically, remained true to these principles to the end<sup>17</sup>. Of the 22 Windsor activists, about whom I have gathered information, whether they were blacklisted and labelled by the fascist government as anarchists or communists or simply antifascist, or not even listed in the CPC and simply known to be opposed to fascism, one-half of them had funerals in Windsor that excluded a Catholic mass, which was replaced instead with a service in the funeral home, often officiated by a Protestant minister, followed by burial in a non-Catholic cemetery. Even among the other half of the Windsor anti-clericals who did have Catholic funerals, about 3 or 4 probably did so, because it was so desired, it would seem, by the surviving family members. Innocente Cudin (S. Marizza di Varmo, Udine 1883 - Windsor 1972), labelled as a communist in the CPC (*busta* 1553), held anticlerical views. Accordingly, he was commemorated with a service at the funeral home at which Rev. Herbert J. Van Nie of the United Church officiated, and then buried in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens<sup>18</sup>, not a Catholic cemetery. His son Lou E. Cudin has confirmed that his family members were antifascist and not churchgoers<sup>19</sup>. In fact, in the case of Innocente's daughter, Leonilda (Lee) Cudin Burnie, who was also blacklisted by the fascist government (CPC *busta* 1553), a service was held at the funeral home with Rev. Linda Blair of Bethel-Maidstone United Church presiding<sup>20</sup>. She too was buried in Greenlawn Cemetery. In these and other similar cases the choice of service and cemetery was clearly quite deliberate. The fact that children followed in their parents' footsteps indicates how new practices adopted in Canada became well established family traditions.

The case of two friends in Windsor who held rather different views of the world is of particular interest. The building contractor Giuseppe Rodolfo Tubaro (Varmo, Udine 1888 - Windsor 1954), credited by Bortolotti for having persuaded him to become an anarchist<sup>21</sup> (Pugliese. "Antifascisti friulani in Canada nel periodo interbellico": 142) and yet one of those activists who was

<sup>17</sup> I wish to thank Rita Infanti for very useful suggestions for researching the Windsor group.

<sup>18</sup> Obituary for Innocente Cudin, 22 November 1972.

<sup>19</sup> Telephone communication on 13 April 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Obituary of Leonilda (Lee) Cudin Burnie, 8 October 2009. Maidstone is a small town near Windsor.

<sup>21</sup> Rossella Di Leo interview.



not registered in the CPC with a separate dedicated dossier, was a very frank and argumentative man, known to be highly critical of churchgoers. With his friend and employee Alessandro Meret (Rivignano, Udine 1885 - Windsor 1957)<sup>22</sup>, whose *partigiano* son Otello Meret was killed by the nazis in Palmanova, Udine on 12 January 1945<sup>23</sup> (Bolzon 188, 197) and who did attend mass on important holidays and occasions, Tubaro would regularly engage in arguments over politics and religion. When Tubaro died in 1954, there was no Catholic mass for him and he was buried in the Windsor Grove cemetery<sup>24</sup>. When Meret died just three years later in 1957, there was a Catholic mass and he was buried in the Catholic cemetery of Sant'Alfonso, located on the other side of the street. Legend has it that the arguments between the two continue across the divide. The Tubaro descendants, it should be noted, have continued the non-religious tradition established by Giuseppe senior for two generations now.

For the Toronto area, as for Windsor, among the 14 odd antifascists examined – not all of them registered in the CPC – again approximately one-half did have Catholic funerals, although perhaps not always by choice, while the other half opted for secular or non-Catholic alternatives. Dante Colussi Corte (Frisanco, Pordenone 1890 - Toronto 1966) (Principe-Pugliese 52-56) who, although known for his antifascist and anticlerical views, which he often expressed in articles written for *Il messaggero italo-canadese*, the newspaper he edited in 1933-1934, did have a Catholic burial, probably organized by others, since he had no close family with him in Canada. Having served in the Italian army in World War I, Colussi-Corte was entitled to be buried in the veterans section of Holy Cross cemetery. Interestingly, though, the simple plaque on his grave<sup>25</sup> omits any reference to his military service. Beniamino (Benny) Bottos (Corva, Azzano Decimo, Pordenone 1909 - Toronto 1999) (CPC *busta* 798) (Pugliese. “Antifascisti friulani in Canada negli anni venti e trenta”: 72-74) was an antifascist and unionist who later became a communist and, although he was a contractor who employed workers, he continued to fight for the rights of labour. His funeral was conducted according to his wishes: although he was cremated and his ashes were buried in Holy Cross Catholic cemetery in the tomb where his wife had preceded him just a few months earlier, there was no Catholic mass<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Marisa Zorzitto of St. Michael's Hospital of Toronto for sharing information about her grandfather.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Javier Grossutti for this reference and for many other important suggestions connected to this research.

<sup>24</sup> Obituary for Tubaro, 23 March 1954.

<sup>25</sup> A photo of the plaque is included in Principe-Pugliese 56.

<sup>26</sup> Bottos obituary, 7 June 1999.

## Deathbed Rites

One may assume that none of those who rejected a Catholic funeral would have received extreme unction or deathbed rites. It is rather curious that, when anarchist Bortolotti received a threat from an adversary, he was told, even if in a figurative manner, to prepare for the last rite, something he would never have sought (Pugliese. “Antifascisti friulani in Canada nel periodo interbellico”: 179). On the question of funeral arrangements a case in Friuli from the 1950s may be of interest. It concerns a contemporary of the Canadian antifascists dealt with in this paper, namely, Vincenzo Pramparo (Lonca, Udine 1901-1955), a well-known *partigiano*, around whose final days controversy still swirls to this day<sup>27</sup>. His activism in Argentina and in Friuli is described by scholar Javier Grossutti (21-25 on Pramparo), who also cites his 1930 censored letter written from Buenos Aires criticizing Mussolini, the monarchy and the Church. Of interest, furthermore, are the details relating to his death and funeral arrangements that have been recorded in interviews conducted by researcher Adriano Bertolini<sup>28</sup>. Although generally opposed to the Church, Pramparo was a friend of the local priest, whom he called by name with no special titles. Surviving daughter Alba says her father was religious and prayed with his children<sup>29</sup>. When he died Pramparo was given a Catholic funeral, according to his surviving spouse’s wishes and not those of his communist comrades who would have preferred a secular ceremony. An unpublished document prepared by Bertolini on the basis of interviews with relatives and antifascist colleagues of the time reveals that the priest did visit Pramparo regularly during his illness and was called (by whom, it is not clear) to his deathbed. Debate surrounds the question whether he confessed or not, or whether, as reliable eye witnesses who were asked by the dying man to remain present report, he confessed only that he had never done any harm to anyone and had always sought justice, declaring that these were his only sins (“La memoria di Iolanda Vettore e suo marito Cressatti Arrigo”). The priest, visibly moved, is reported to have blessed him quickly and run out of the house overcome by emotion. Some doubt may remain as to whether such a confession constitutes a religious conversion or sudden submission to Church authority. But there is no questioning the upright principles that Pramparo is well known to have lived by.

<sup>27</sup> A debate on the topic took place during a seminar, titled “Una centrale anarchica di 100 anni fa: Il comune di Rivolto”, organized by Dr. Javier Grossutti and held in Rivolto, Udine on 22 June 2017.

<sup>28</sup> I am very grateful to Adriano Bertolini for having granted permission to read and cite from the materials he has gathered.

<sup>29</sup> Part of the 14 October 2006 interview with Alba Pramparo is cited in Grossutti 25.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, on the basis of the data available for the antifascist Friulians in Canada – and not only in Canada – one may surmise that the anticlerical sentiments shared by many of these engaged persons involved a rejection of organized religion, that of the Roman Catholic Church in particular. And yet the beliefs which were adopted in its place, fundamentally egalitarian in nature, do not appear to be diametrically opposed to basic Christian tenets. Perhaps one may take as an emblematic example the case of Windsor grocer Giovanni Vendrasco, who was born in Crespano del Grappa, Treviso in 1884, lived in Arzene, Pordenone before emigrating to Canada in 1906, and died in Windsor in 1944. A decidedly anticlerical activist, he was to inspire a passion for political debate in his descendants, many of whom live in the USA. When he died Vendrasco was given a funeral service conducted by a Protestant minister and was buried in the non-denominational Victoria Memorial Gardens cemetery<sup>30</sup>. About him daughter Rita Joanne Vendrasco Scoren wrote that he was «an idealist who rejected the Catholic church and yet believed in his fellow man. He respected people of all colors and creeds, and lent assistance generously»<sup>31</sup>.

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