



Eugenio Balzan & Italian Immigration to Canada. A New Book by Corriere della Sera

Susannah Gold (November 15, 2009)



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Broggin is the biographer of Eugenio Balzan. The book gathers a series of articles written by Eugenio Balzan when he was a young reporter. Balzan was sent to Canada to document the lives of the emigrants. While Canada had been depicted as a promised land, reality was much harsher as Balzan describes in his articles.

Just as many immigrants today in Italy, Italians in the early years of the 20th century who immigrated to Canada lived 10 in a room, couldn't find jobs and often had to beg to have a meager existence.

Gian Antonio Stella in his preface to the book compares the Italian experience of yesteryear with that of today. He notes that Balzan points out three issues were common to emigrants of all colors, races and time periods: each have a dream, they find someone willing to take advantage of them as they search out their dream and the sadness of the end of the dream.

These emigrants were largely all men between the ages of 18 and 40 looking for work. The conditions they found when they arrived were horrible, professionally and personally for these men. Often they were given misinformation about their working conditions. Worst of all, many Canadians were not at all pleased to have the Italians among them and considered them a disturbance. All of this sounds quite familiar and seems to be the same reaction that people all over the world have to immigrants living amongst them.

Balzan's articles are engaging and interesting descriptions of cruel times, much like photos of migrant works, they create a sense of the problems that affect people just like us.

As I was reading this book, it suddenly occurred to me that this was perhaps exactly what happened to my own grandparents when they immigrated to Canada from Poland in the late 1920s. Quotas for Jews trying to get into the United States were full and in order to escape pogroms in Poland, Eastern European Jews had to go to Canada if they couldn't get into the United States. I remember a few stories about how cold it was and how difficult for the family to relocate and make a new life in that foreign land. Apparently, many Italians fared no better. Many families around the world today are listening to the same stories from loved ones who are far away.

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