



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

CHPC • NUMBER 038 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, meeting number 38. Pursuant to the order of reference of Friday, March 6, 2009, we are considering of Bill C-302, an act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their enemy alien designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history.

Our first witness is Mr. Pacetti. Would you please make your presentation, sir?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

Good morning colleagues. It is a little different and nerve-racking to be on this side of the table, but I do hope you will be gentle with me.

[English]

I don't want to repeat what I've said in Parliament during second reading and during the debate on the private member's bill, but there are a few areas I want to address.

[Translation]

There is no doubt that injustices were done to persons of Italian origin through their enemy alien designation during the Second World War.

[English]

Basically, I want to talk about the questions that may surround the way the internment was conducted. We are still not sure as to the number of internees there were. There were different estimates, but we start with the number of 6,000 people who were originally arrested. Some were held overnight, some were held up to three or four years, and those are normally the people we called interned.

We have a pretty hard number as to how many were sent to Petawawa. I think 100% of these individuals were male, taken as young as 16 years old and as old as 70 years old. The funny thing here is that they were not all Italians. For some, it was simply because their name ended in a vowel.

[Translation]

Many people with French names were arrested.

[English]

The exact number of people in Petawawa...there are estimates of up to 700, but there were also some other detainees in three other camps. There was a camp, as it turns out, on Saint Helen's Island and there were two camps in Fredericton. Some of those were transferred to Petawawa, some were never transferred anywhere and we sort of lost track. There could be over 1,000 internees that we are not aware of, so that is also a problem.

To put it into context, in the 1940s, when this happened, there were about 112,000 Canadians of Italian origin. I think I have a stat here of 40,000 actually born in Canada. So you're talking about...let's go with the number 700 internees out of a possible 112,000 Canadians of Italian origin. To put it in context, in the U.S. there were only 228 interned out of roughly 300,000 Americans of Italian origin.

I want to talk about the impact on people's lives. We forget about the impact this has had on people's lives. We're talking about the 1940s. The culture was different and times were different. These were immigrants. Again, the people who were interned were not necessarily all immigrants. Some had been here for generations and didn't even speak any Italian, but were accused because they had an Italian name.

I would simply like to read an excerpt of an article.

[Translation]

It is written in English, but it gives a good idea of Italian cultural reality at that time.

[English]

It says:

But my grandmother didn't speak with her daughter about the internment until the 1950s, and then only briefly. "There was no reason to discuss it," my grandmother, an American citizen of English descent, says unquestioningly. "We put it out of our minds and behind us. I didn't tell any of the children until they were grown. We were so ashamed."

That is basically the cultural aspect behind it. This was a grandmother speaking.

If you read further on in the article, it says:

When my grandfather died in 1957, the story of precisely what he was thinking... died with him, as he wanted. My grandmother will say only that he was terribly depressed during his weeks there, that he feared the ruin of his career, that his health had declined.

A lot of the stories that are being told are actually from people who were not even at those internment camps; they are stories told by the families. They were affected but were not present in the internment camps.

Some were basically arrested because they were sons of Italian parents. Believe it or not, the majority of them were illiterates.

[Translation]

They were accused of being spies. They were illiterate but they were accused of being spies. Imagine families receiving mail that was marked "POW". At that time,

[English]

everybody was looking at their next-door neighbour's mail and who came in and who came out. Here you are, you receive a letter that's marked in big red letters, POW. How do you think that affected your family? You're talking about people who were arrested. Had it been for a week or more, you're talking about sole breadwinners, people who in those days had to bring home the pay, and if they didn't bring home the pay you lost your home. You didn't have money to pay the rent.

Unfortunately, the stories continued even after they were released. There were people who lost their businesses, there were rumours, innuendoes, and all kinds of stories that kept going, so they destroyed families.

[Translation]

That is why many people from this community changed their names. The community lost many professionals, physicians or doctors, because an entire generation was lost. Obviously, this generation was deprived of its rights and freedoms.

[English]

Just quickly, the bill is requesting an apology. I think it's pretty clear. To speak as a non-partisan, the Liberal Party had a chance. They never decided to apologize. I want to acknowledge that—I have a copy of the speech—in 1990, November 4, Prime Minister Mulroney, in front of the National Congress of Italian Canadians and the Canadian Italian Business and Professional Association, called the event that happened during the internment "legally wrong and immoral", but he never officially apologized in the House of Commons. I know this is what this bill wants to do. I think that's what we want to focus on.

[Translation]

This bill is simply asking for recognition of the unfair treatment suffered by Canadians of Italian origin.

[English]

In terms of precedents, we're not creating a precedent. There have been official apologies made to the Japanese community, in 1988. There were official apologies, to many of you who were here in 2006, to the Chinese Canadians. There were also some apologies for the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident. I think there was another one for the 1939 *St. Louis* incident. There were other apologies issued, not all of them in the House of Commons. I don't want to necessarily parallel the apology also given to the first nations, but that also

creates a precedent. So there have been other apologies in the House of Commons.

In terms of compensation, my bill doesn't specify a specific amount. Basically the premise is to try to educate Canadians and especially Italian Canadians who don't know about these incidents. I think anything that goes about educating our population will not hurt, so that we don't repeat the sins of the past in the future. Again, I want to repeat that this is all about Canadians apologizing to Canadians. It's not Canadians apologizing to Italians, which I've heard being spoken of here before. I want members around the table to keep that in mind. This has nothing to do with Italians. It's Canadians of Italian origin, but it's mainly Canadians committing injustices to Canadians.

I thank you for your time. I'm open to questions. I don't want to take too much time because I know when I'm sitting on the other side of the table you sort of tune out.

I'm ready for questions, Mr. Chair.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodriguez is first.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the initiative, Mr. Pacetti.

[Translation]

The Italian community has played an extraordinary role in Canada's development, that is clear. Today, it is part of the Canadian social fabric. For that reason and for many others, this bill is relevant and necessary, because the community suffered greatly during this dark period. That is why it is important that we discuss this, debate it, and ideally, pass this bill.

The opposition parties, therefore the Liberal Party, the Bloc and the NDP, support it. Only the Conservative government is against the bill. Last week, the Conservatives told us to my great surprise that this bill would divide the Italian community. I would like to hear your comments on that, because personally, I feel the opposite. I feel this bill will pull the community together, as it seeks to obtain an official apology from Parliament as well as specific actions to follow that, as set out in the bill.

In your opinion, is this a bill that will divide the community, as the Conservatives say, rather than unite it through concrete action?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, Italians helped build Canada, but Canada was built by immigrants. Therefore, I do not believe we should target the Italian community in particular. This bill is doing justice to a community that deserves it. As I was saying in my comments, we have apologized to the Japanese and the Chinese, but there are other communities that expect to receive apologies as well. Is the community united? Yes. Is there 100% unanimity? No. However, I believe it is about 95%.

You will be hearing presentations from other Italian community organizations. In fact, in all the work that has been done in the past by the National Congress of Italian-Canadians, all of the major Italian Canadian organizations in Canada were included. Therefore, on the topic of divisions, I do not see any. There are always particular individuals who have difficulties. That is true even in Parliament, when there are debates between the parties. I believe this is normal. Several Conservatives supported the bill, but I think that perhaps some of them do not understand what happened. In fact, the Conservatives have always led the way in offering official apologies.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Allow me to interrupt you, because we do not have much time.

In 2005, there was an agreement in principle. I see several people in the room who were part of those discussions or negotiations on the agreement in principle. Is the process the same, in a way? Will the various organizations that play a fundamental role within the community—we will be speaking with them later on—be included in the negotiations, and at the end, will everything be managed by the national congress?

For example, last week, the CIBPA said they wanted to be included in the negotiations. Personally, I see no problem with that, because several groups negotiated the agreement, and afterwards, there was an umbrella organization to manage the comprehensive agreement.

Is this where we should be headed?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Yes. Agreements were reached in the past with the National Congress of Italian Canadians. The CIBPA indicated that it wanted to continue to take part in negotiating agreements. I agree that it should continue to do so. However, I do not think it should be specifically mentioned.

[English]

It's going to defeat the purpose.

[Translation]

I do not think that we need to list five or six different organizations. The CIBPA is mentioned in all presentations made by the congress. There are other organizations in Quebec. There is the Italian-Canadian Community Foundation. There is the Casa d'Italia, which brings together all Italian immigrants, and the Order Sons of Italy of Canada, which will be making a presentation. I therefore think that there is unanimity within those organizations.

•(1115)

[English]

The Chair: Madam Lavallée.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Who will assume the leadership of the negotiations and the foundation? There is talk of restitution, so money will be paid out. Which of the four major organizations that we have referred to will take the lead?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: First of all, we want to obtain an official apology.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Let us assume that has been done. Let us imagine what would follow.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: The second step would involve restitution. Negotiations would have to be held with the National Congress of Italian Canadians, a national organization that represents all the other Italian Canadian groups. Some organizations are stronger in some regions, but I do think that we have a consensus.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Therefore, restitution would be negotiated with the congress.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It would be negotiated with the National Congress of Italian Canadians, as is clearly stated in the bill.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Very well.

As for the rest, for example, the educational foundation that is proposed under paragraph 4(2)(a), who will be in charge of that?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Excuse me?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: In the bill, paragraph 4(2)(a) refers to an educational foundation.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: That is a good question. The National Congress of Italian Canadians would be in charge, through a committee that has already been struck. A foundation has already been established with several representatives from each organization, such as the Order Sons of Italy, which would have two members. All in all, there would be between 10 and 14 members on the board of directors of the foundation. The following witnesses can talk to you about that at further length. I will not personally negotiate that part of the bill.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I simply want to understand—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: If you wish, I can give you the details, but—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I want to make sure that I have understood. You have talked to me about the organization that has been established—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: A foundation was created to manage those funds, because people had been expecting to receive them for the past three or four years. The community had already considered the possibility of a recession three years ago and had indicated that it had established the foundation, which would be made up of several organizations. It had already been decided that the foundation would include two members—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: What is the name of that foundation?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: If I am not mistaken, it is the NCIC Foundation. It has already been established.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: What will its makeup be?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: As I have mentioned, there will be a board of directors with 10 members, including four for the congress and two each for the Canadian-Italian Business and Professional Association, the Order Sons of Italy of Canada and the Italian-Canadian Community Foundation.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: If the bill were adopted, would it settle the grievances of the Quebec- and Canadian-Italian communities once and for all?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I think that the only outstanding grievance is not having received an apology from Parliament. The Italian community has reached a rather mature state; I think that an apology is all it needs. We have talked about compensation, but I do not believe that that is the important issue. Those are small amounts compared to the funds that can be raised by the community. The demands made throughout all these years can be summed up by the fact that the community was expecting an apology. I would therefore answer in the affirmative.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: That would therefore settle the issue.

Last week, officials from the Canada Post Corporation spoke to us about the section that refers to the commemoration of the internment of Italians, and they said that the approach you had taken in your bill was not feasible.

Would you be greatly troubled if we amended that section in order to make it more practicable and avoid potential litigation?

• (1120)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I would like to briefly comment on two issues. I am not surprised by their comments. They always find an excuse not to do what parliamentarians want, however—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: That will be held against you.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: However, I understand where they're coming from and I agree. I read the minutes of the last meeting and agree with the amendment you put forward. In fact, it was a simple suggestion. I even agree with Mr. Del Mastro, and I too do not want to politicize Canada Post. I am willing to support that amendment. Moreover, yours is a good wording.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Pacetti, for coming before us. Thank you for answering that last question, because that was an outstanding concern in the New Democratic Party.

Overall, I'm very pleased with this bill. I think it does address an outstanding issue that has to be addressed in order to close a chapter in our history.

I was interested in what you said at the outset about how many of the stories have not been told because of a sense of family shame. I told a story last week, but to me, it's something I've lived with all my life. My grandparents were Scottish and lived in the Italian neighbourhood in Timmins. They knew well what happened to the Italians in the war, and it was something never to be spoken of. Every now and then I'd start to ask questions and I would be told that's not history, we don't talk about that. This was because of the sense of shame.

I started to research it. We talk about having to put these things in context of the times and how people saw things at the time. I did extensive readings of the microfiche of the local newspapers for the 1930s, and the local editorials loved Mussolini. They were always complimenting Mussolini in the local papers, saying here's a guy who's standing up, here's a guy getting something done; here's a guy standing up to those Bolsheviks.

Then they would turn, and the attacks in our community were against people from Finland. There were lots of editorials saying that we should have wholesale deportation of all the rotten Finns because they were communists and they were not loyal Canadians. There was never any mention of the Italians in the 1930s in any of the papers in northern Ontario as being disloyal or a threat to the empire—not until 1940. Suddenly the local papers were calling for the Italians to be subject to the treatment that they had previously wanted the Finns and Ukrainians to receive.

I think it really shows the arbitrary nature of history when we start to suddenly identify people as enemy aliens who had previously been considered loyal. Nobody at the start of the war turned around and said to the editorial boards of all the local papers, you guys have been promoting Mussolini for years, so why aren't you interned? They went from being treated as respectable citizens, and very good Italian community leaders were targeted because of these kinds of newspaper attacks.

I think that what you say is very true. For those families who suffered for it and for those families who were ashamed to even speak about it years later, this heals a wound.

Certainly the New Democratic Party will be supporting this bill. With my colleagues, the only concern was about the identification in number four for restitution to the National Congress of Italian Canadians as the only group identified. We had another group here before us saying that they wanted to be part of that.

Is there language that we could use in the bill that would alleviate the sense that one group is perhaps being brought to the front and not other groups in the Italian-Canadian community?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you, Mr. Angus. Thank you for your party's support. It was important to have this bill passed with your party's support.

Let me answer the last question first. In terms of having consensus, there is already a consensus and foundation in place and all these organizations already take part in administering this foundation. I wasn't present at the meeting, but if you read the minutes, they say they want to be part of the negotiations, and I think you're going to hear the same thing from the other organizations who are going to make presentations afterwards.

They are part of the organization. They want to continue to be part of the negotiations, but I don't think you need to have six entities in the bill. The community is large enough. It's going to be never-ending. We have tons of organizations that could be named, but the national congress, like every other community, is representative of the Italian Canadians. I think there will be others speaking to it in terms of what their mandate is and what their role is going to be.

I'm very comfortable with that. I don't think there needs to be a discussion on it. During my speeches in Parliament, I said that the other organizations will be part of the negotiation process. The fact that we spoke about it here in committee is on the record, saying that they will be part of it. I don't see why the bill has to be amended. We're going to get caught up in another bureaucracy entanglement for no reason.

In terms of the shame, I agree with you. I represent the riding with the highest concentration of Italians. I'm one of the few urban MPs who grew up in his riding. I didn't know about this internment until I became an MP. I'm not an expert on this subject matter; I just thought that it was important to bring it forward. You talk about shame. My parents were not affected by this. We were affected as a community, but not directly affected.

Putting it into context, I think it is something that has to come out. Getting the official apology in Parliament is something that is going to set an example. It is going to make a point out there and we are going to be able to educate Canadians so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Pacetti.

At the outset, I want to say, to begin with, that I think you are a Canadian proud of his Italian heritage. I respect that. I also put myself in that class. My disagreement with you on this bill in no way, in my view, casts any doubt on the fact that you're both a proud Canadian and a proud Canadian of Italian descent. I want to make that clear at the outset. I respect the efforts you make on behalf of the Italian community.

There a couple of things I want to raise before I get to my point. To begin with, if you set up a fund that is going to be administered by a single group, whether or not they were involved in the negotiations at the outset, and they will be the only administrator of funds, I believe that in the long term that is going to be divisive. I've served, as I've indicated previously, on small organizations, such as the Peterborough and District Italian Club, and I can tell you that the disbursement of funds always causes friction. And I think this would cause a lot of friction.

With respect to shame, I think there was a time in Canada.... I know, because my own family lived through it. My dad's family had seven boys and two girls. They were raised in the 1940s in northern Ontario—it's what I call northern Ontario and what Charlie would call the south. They lived through it. My mother was forbidden to see my father, even though they were both Roman Catholic. My father was an Italian, and my mother's family was of French-Canadian descent, and that just wasn't acceptable. That wasn't something you did.

I'm aware that those things existed. I would even argue that discrimination existed against Italian Canadians well into the seventies in Canada, but we worked past it. I don't think there's any shame any more in this country in being Italian. I can tell you that my grandfather would often speak about how this country gave him the opportunity to achieve things that he never could have achieved at home in Italy. He's always proud to be Canadian. I think we're past those things.

I want to deal with this issue of the apology, because I believe this is the outstanding issue. I want to go back to what was said by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in a speech to the National Congress of Italian Canadians. I've cut this down:

Our diversity is a source of immense pride for Canadians. And rightly so. But the challenge we face is to make sure that in respecting our diversity and our heritage we do not fragment our citizenship.

On March 8 of this year I stated that the record would not be complete until we addressed ourselves to the wrongs suffered by other groups of Canadians. On May 23, in the House of Commons, I made clear this commitment included the indignity suffered by the Italian Canadian community between 1940 and 1943, a community that traces its Canadian roots back a hundred years. I am here today in part to advance that process.

...

What happened to many Italian Canadians is deeply offensive to the simple notion of respect for human dignity and the presumption of innocence. The brutal injustice was inflicted arbitrarily, not only on individuals suspected of being security risks but also on individuals whose only crime was being of Italian origin. In fact, many of the arrests were based on membership in Italian Canadian organizations—much like the ones represented here today. None of the 700 internees was ever charged with an offence and no judicial proceedings were launched. It was often, in the simplest terms, an act of prejudice—organized and carried out under law, but prejudice nevertheless.

In 1988 my Government revoked the War Measures Act—so that never again will such injustices be inflicted on innocent and unsuspecting Canadians. By creating the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, we are also saying “never again”. But to say “never again” without explicitly and formally recognising as well that a wrong has been done is not enough.

...

This kind of behaviour was not then, is not now, and never will be acceptable in a civilized nation that purports to respect the rule of law. On behalf of the government and people of Canada, I offer a full and unqualified apology for the wrongs done to our fellow Canadians of Italian origin during World War II.

Those were the words of the Prime Minister of Canada after he undertook an initiative in the House of Commons to put an end to the War Measures Act. These were significant moves made by then Prime Minister Mulroney. It was a significant apology made to the Italian community on behalf of all Canadians by our prime minister. It was a significant moment in our past.

• (1130)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Chairman, quickly, all he has to do is hand the speech over to the sitting Prime Minister and have him say the same words in Parliament and I think everybody will be happy. That's exactly what the bill says.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This a particularly interesting moment for me. I was the president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians in 1992 when we fought for this. At the time I remember meeting, together with the German community and the Chinese Canadian community, with ministers of Mr. Mulroney to ask that he do that in the House of Commons, in Parliament. We never accepted that as the official apology at the time that I was president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, and we don't now. The Parliament of Canada is where it belongs, as it has been done for other organizations, such as the Japanese-Canadian community and others. I just want to set the record straight that I was very involved at the time in trying to get this resolved.

With respect to the comments, I will make a couple of comments to update this.

With respect to the concerns of my colleague on the opposite side that there will be disagreements, there are always disagreements in any community as they work things out. The National Congress of Italian Canadians is the umbrella organization for the Italian-Canadian community in Canada. It is not this government's role to decide who represents that community. It is decided by the community itself, through the membership. The people here will attest to that later this morning.

I think the honourable member's bill makes sense.

I wanted to clarify those things and put them on the table, because I understand the structure of that community very well, having volunteered in it.

I want to say to my honourable colleague Mr. Del Mastro that I can guarantee there was discrimination well into the seventies and eighties, having experienced it directly myself, as did many members of the community.

And thank you, Massimo, for bringing this forward. This is very important. However, I want to ask—because I assume this has been done—about the reason behind your tabling the bill. I presume it was to get the apology in Parliament, as you said, and to ensure there is a proper relationship with the leadership of the community in terms of the ongoing allocation and administration of funds, that there is a coordinated effort on the part of the community, and that the will of that community is respected, as opposed to going to smaller groups or anyone else. Am I correct in making that statement?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: We're spending a lot of time and money on all this.

It's funny, Mr. Del Mastro spoke for about four or five minutes rather than asking a question, so it means he agreed. The problem is not in administering the money. Once again, the Italian community is being labelled. The Ukrainian community has been given \$10 million to administer on its own; meanwhile, the Italian community is not good enough, it can't be trusted.

• (1135)

Hon. Maria Minna: Well, that was my question.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: That is the reason I'm bringing the bill forward to the heritage committee. The minister in charge of this file, Mr. Kenney, does not seem to understand the differences between communities. There have been apologies in the House of Commons

that were addressed to the Chinese community and the Japanese community. The Italians are waiting.

The money is another aspect. My personal belief is that the money should be 100% for education purposes, not necessarily to Italian associations, but through the congress. If it chooses to do that, I think it's mature enough. There's enough ability to raise money within the community that if they need to raise money for certain projects they can do it. I think the money is a secondary aspect.

My personal belief is the money should go to educate—not just Canadians, but start with Italian Canadians, because we have a miscomprehension just with the 13 or 14 MPs around the table.

The Chair: Ms. Minna, you have a very short time left.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'll close with a very quick comment. Education is extremely important, because the Italian-Canadian community does not have a clear understanding of this situation or the experience of the Italian-Canadian community during the post-war experience.

From 1957, when I came, and to date, there is a huge amount of misunderstanding. There was a lot of stereotyping that went on, for years. Three generations of our kids were streamed into vocational schools in Ontario, that I know of. I don't know about the rest of the country.

There's a huge amount that needs to be dealt with in that community. I thank you for taking the initiative.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: And it continues today, Ms. Minna.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Pomerleau, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Pacetti, I would like to thank you for your presentation, as well as for having risen in the House to table the bill. I lived for many years on Langelier Boulevard, not far in fact from Mr. Gagliano. I am very familiar with the construction sector in Saint-Léonard. As a carpenter, I worked for almost everyone there, including Mayori, Naskali and Pavage Del Papa et Fils, and so on.

The Italian community was ostracized because of what happened during the war. In fact, Italy was at war against Canada and its allies. Here at home, that was invoked to muzzle Italian Canadians. People who did not participate in the fighting, did not send money back to Italy and who were not combatants were thrown into jail without any explanation. They were jailed so that the community would keep a low profile.

At the previous committee meeting, I drew a parallel, which happened to be reported by some newspapers. I would like to go over that again today. Quebec experienced the same situation when the War Measures Act was imposed. Some 400 Quebeckers were jailed without any reason. They were not members of the FLQ and had never been accused or taken to court. The government took advantage of the fact that some groups were committing reprehensible acts in order to silence Quebeckers. However, they locked up the wrong people. The same thing happened with the Italian community.

My parallel is as follows. If people in my riding ask me for my opinion—and one person has asked so far—I would say that I agree that the injustices done to the Italian community should be recognized. I agree that compensation in one form or another should be offered, knowing that such restitution will never redress all the injustices that the community suffered.

If people in my riding ask me why Quebeckers are compensating the Italian community, while Quebeckers who were locked up will never be compensated and never receive a statement of apology in the House, what should I tell them? That is not an easy question to answer.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: No, it certainly is not. The bill refers to human rights abuses. The Italian community suffered an injustice; there is no doubt about that, there is no “grey area”. Italians who left their country to settle here were fleeing the Italian regime. Times were different. Italians came here to work and to have a better life. The people interned were shopkeepers and businesspeople. One of them manufactured boats used by the Canadian Forces. And yet, he was imprisoned and wound up losing his business. I could give you a myriad of other examples.

Even today, rights abuse persists; it is something we hear about in other committees. The incidents may be less striking, but remain, nonetheless, behaviour that should not be tolerated. Will Canada ever be entirely free from human rights abuse? Our charter and our sophisticated system of rights mean that we should be able to have a country free from the scourge of human rights abuse. At least, I would certainly hope so.

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I had the honour of heading out to Halifax this year and seeing where my parents got off the boat. My dad had a grade six education, and my mom had a grade three education. My aunts and uncles all came in the 1950s and early 1960s.

My dad died very early, but he accomplished an extraordinary amount. He was buried with a Canadian flag in his casket.

I talked to my uncle the other day about this. We had a long conversation. There's never been any sorrow or embarrassment in our household in talking about this. His words to me were profound. He said, “Apologize for what—for allowing a million of us to come

to this country? You're sitting in Parliament. I'm sitting in a really nice, beautiful home. I'm retired. My kids have all gone to university. We've lived an extraordinary life. You've been back to Calabria. You've been to Roiano. The way it is now is certainly not the way it was in the 1950s when we left there. Without this country you wouldn't have had anywhere near the advantages you have now.”

I was at the Markham Centennial Bocce Club on Sunday. We were opening up this brand-new bocce club in Markham. If you had told me when we first moved to Markham in the 1970s that there would be an Italian mayor, an Italian member of Parliament, three Italian councillors and a regional councillor, and I'd be cutting the ribbon for the Markham Centennial Bocce Club, I would have told you you were crazy; it was not going to happen.

On what concerns me about this, I do believe it's divisive. At that event on Sunday nobody said that Canada needed to apologize for anything it had done. Every single one of them—like you, like Ms. Minna—is a proud Canadian. They're proud of their Italian heritage.

But what troubles me most about this bill—and I talked about it in Parliament—is there can be no denying it was Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King who interned the Italians. Liberal Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent refused to apologize to Italians. Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson refused to apologize to Italians. Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau refused to apologize to Italians. Jean Chrétien, a Liberal Prime Minister, refused to apologize to Italian Canadians.

Ms. Minna talked about being the president of the congress in 1992. One year later she sat in Parliament and could not get Jean Chrétien to apologize to Italian Canadians. As a cabinet minister, she could not get her cabinet colleagues to agree to apologize. Prime Minister Martin refused to apologize to Italian Canadians. It was only a Conservative Prime Minister who took the step of recognizing what had happened. He apologized directly to the community, said there were mistakes made, and on behalf of the Government of Canada he apologized for the mistakes made.

To say that this bill is not divisive, I simply can't agree with you. In my discussions with all the people I represent—and I represent a very large Italian community in Markham, Richmond Hill, and King—they're proud of the fact that our government recently provided funding through the community historical recognition program, I think it was \$5 million, so we could educate people and recognize some of the history of what happened.

They recognize this bill for what it is, frankly—an attempt to divide the community and gain back some kind of support within the Italian community that the Liberal Party feels it has lost. It's a desperate attempt to divide Canadians along ethnic lines yet again. That's all this bill does. This bill doesn't address how Italian Canadians feel. It simply seeks to extract millions of dollars for someone else's pet project—perhaps your pet project—and continue the divisiveness.

I ask you, why did the Liberal prime ministers I mentioned—Mackenzie King, St. Laurent, Pearson, Trudeau, Chrétien, and Martin—turn their backs on Italians?

•(1145)

If it's true that the only way Italians can feel better in this country is if they get an apology in Parliament, and that the apology of the Prime Minister of Canada in 1988 isn't enough for them, why did the Liberal Party turn their back on Italians for so many years? You have been elected longer than I have, yet you chose a minority Parliament to bring forward a bill that you knew would be divisive. You had massive majorities for many years, yet for all those years you chose to ignore the Italian people. Now you bring this forward because you think you can do more damage in the minority Parliament and create more division in the community. That's what I find troubling about the bill.

The Chair: We've gone past the time.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Sorry, I didn't realize my time had run out.

Hon. Maria Minna: Point of order. I have to say that prime ministers in the past who did not deal with this were wrong.

The Chair: It's not a point of order.

Hon. Maria Minna: He's attacking the community, and I think I need to deal with it.

The Chair: It's not a point of order.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'll deal with it when my turn comes.

The Chair: Mr. Pacetti, would you like—

Mr. Paul Calandra: On a point of order, I was not at any point attacking the community, and I think she should apologize to me for that comment.

The Chair: That's debate.

Mr. Pacetti, would you care to answer—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: With all due respect, I'm not sure how this committee runs, but we should respect the witnesses enough to allow them to answer a question. There were a couple of things said I take issue with.

I never said this bill was going to make me feel better. It might make you feel better, but it's not going to make me feel better. I think it's just going to make Italians aware of what happened in the past. The Liberal governments in the past did not apologize. I said that in my speech, if you would listen. The Liberal Party did not do the job, but the Conservatives are the ones that have been divisive. They chose to apologize to the Chinese community, the Japanese community, and the Ukrainian community, without apologizing to the Italian community. There is no divisiveness in the Italian community; it's the Conservatives that have this divisiveness.

The Italian community is about more than about bocce clubs. The problem is not with your dad who got here and made a success of it. My dad was a success also. I think Dean was saying his dad made a success of it. That's not the point. The point is that Italians who came here had to change their names and today we don't even know that they're Italians. These were professionals who came here in the forties and the thirties. We lost a whole generation of professionals. These are people who could have been in Parliament. They probably were in Parliament, had Italian names, but were forced to change them. That's the issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, members.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to recess for five minutes.

•(1145)

(Pause)

•(1150)

The Chair: Welcome to the second part of our meeting today.

We welcome the National Congress of Italian Canadians. I'm going to introduce Michael Stante.

Like I said the other day, my Italian isn't very good. And sometimes people have problems with my name.

If you would, sir, please introduce the various people as our witnesses.

Mr. Michael Stante (President, National Congress of Italian Canadians): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have a little preamble before I introduce everyone, if I may.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, on behalf of all of the members of the Canadian Italian community here today, I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity to appear before you today. I would also like to formally thank all of the members of Parliament—members of all different political stripes—who have supported and who continue to support this bill.

•(1155)

[*English*]

My name is Michael Stante. I'm the current national president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, herewith referred to as NCIC. I am also a former president of the CIBPA, Quebec region, and former vice-president of both the NCIC Quebec and the Italian Canadian Community Foundation.

Joining me at this table are Mr. Nino Colavecchio, former national president of the NCIC, former president of the national federation of CIBPA, former president of the CIBPA Montreal, or Quebec, and former president of NCIC Quebec region; and Mr. Dominic Campione, former president of the NCIC, director of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, and member of the CIBPA Toronto. Both Mr. Colavecchio and Mr. Campione will be presenting the NCIC's position with reference to Bill C-302.

Representing the Italian Canadian Community Foundation, we have Mr. Galella and Mr. Tony Sciascia. Mr. Sciascia is the current president of the NCIC Quebec region, former national president of the NCIC, and governor of the Italian Canadian Community Foundation. Mr. Mario Galella is the former president of the Italian Canadian Community Foundation. It is Mr. Tony Sciascia who will be making the presentation on behalf of the foundation.

Representing the Casa D'Italia, we have Mr. Ciro Cucciniello, who is the longest-serving board member of the Casa D'Italia. I only have to assume that sooner or later he's going to be president.

We also are joined by Mr. Fernando Forcucci, the immediate past president of the Sons of Italy of Canada. He will be presenting the position of the Sons of Italy.

If I've taken the time to identify at some length the standing of these members of our community, it is only to impress upon you that these are individuals with longstanding community service and for some of whom determined debate has been ongoing for 20 years or more. So it's nothing new to them.

I would like to point out, as shown by our collective presence here at this table, that the NCIC once again is seeking to forge a consensus of the various interest groups in the Canadian-Italian community, much in the same manner as it did when we negotiated the ACE program.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I would like to call upon Mr. Nino Colavecchio and Mr. Dominic Campione to present the position of the national congress.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio (Former President, National Congress of Italian Canadians): Thank you for having us here.

Mr. Chair, at the onset, I would like to state clearly that the National Congress of Italian Canadians is a non-partisan group. You will find within our group members of every political party in Canada. As such, we are not here today to play party politics but to continue in a quest that began well over 20 years ago for our community and thus for this congress.

The National Congress of Italian Canadians is not a club or an association. It is an umbrella group that represents the Italian community across the country. In fact, every Italian-Canadian association that has spoken to this committee has representation within the congress in some manner.

The NCIC was able to build a consensus within the Italian community when it was the lead group in the negotiations with the Canadian government for the ACE program, and when that program was cancelled the NCIC maintained the channels of communication open with various community groups in order to continue to lobby for this cause.

Some of us at this table have been instrumental in keeping this issue on the forefront for over 20 years. The document that we are tabling today—

A voice: No, we didn't table it.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: We didn't table the document. We have a document that is available for you, which is a report on this long journey. We hope this journey will culminate in the adoption of Bill C-302.

The NCIC emphatically supports Bill C-302. The bill responds to the historical demands of our community, in that it provides for an apology and financial redress.

It is important to note that the apology is an essential element in closing this unfortunate episode in Canadian history. Although then Prime Minister Mulroney did in fact apologize at an event held by the Italian community, a formal apology by the Canadian government through a motion in the House of Commons was never

received, and it has been pointed out that such an apology was given to other communities for events of this nature.

The financial redress takes on a particular significance, in that it will serve to commemorate the event and to ensure that it is not forgotten. Historians rightfully say that those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. We believe that educating Canadians on this event and on the positive contribution of Italian Canadians to the evolution of Canada will serve not only the Italian-Canadian community, but all Canadians who have been harmed by ethnic, racial, or political profiling.

I now give the floor to my colleague and former president, Dominic Campione.

• (1200)

Mr. Dominic Campione (Former President, National Congress of Italian Canadians): I'm not sure how far "former" goes; that could be the first president or the immediate past president. I'm the immediate past president. My name appears on the signing document of the agreement in principle.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members, for giving us the opportunity to speak on this most important issue for the Italian-Canadian community.

We are here before you, although with gratitude and passion, disheartened and dismayed at the injustices done to 17,000 Canadians of Italian origin who were designated as enemy aliens under the War Measures Act and who constantly had to report to the RCMP. There were 6,000 men and women arrested and 700 interned. Children from the age of 16 and adults all the way up to 70 were there. Doctors, lawyers, priests, carpenters, bakers, contractors—you name it, they were there, averaging 16 months to five years in Petawawa, in St. Helen's, in Fredericton.

In all of these, no one was ever charged. They had no right to counsel—as a lawyer, I think that's very important—and no fair hearing or trial. A whole community under siege, discriminated against and devastated, has, over 69 years and five and a half months, from June 10, 1940, not seen these injustices corrected. When is this terrible wrong going to turn into a right?

We firmly believe that the agreement in principle signed by the Government of Canada on November 12, 2005, under the ACE program, with its full funding administered by the NCIC foundation, was the correct course of action in correcting this wrong. This agreement between the Government of Canada and the four signatories on behalf of the Italian-Canadian community was the culmination of many years of work by the NCIC and others on the internment issue. With good faith in negotiations, the Italian community, united in purpose and heart, would put closure on this internment issue.

A central part of the bill was with respect to education, including an endowment fund. Through education, one not only remembers the past but is taught the past, ensuring that it's never repeated. It was also contemplated in the bill that we set up Italian chair studies.

To our shock and dismay, the correction of this wrong was again not to be. In June 2006, the Government of Canada unilaterally replaced it with CHIRP, without any consultation.

Notwithstanding the discussions and meetings that followed thereafter with the appropriate ministers, Bev Oda and Jason Kenney, with the NCIC throughout this taking the lead in bringing the parties together to discuss the issues and build consensus and unity in our community, no resolution was found.

The Italian Canadian community is a strong and united community. We applaud and support the Honourable Massimo Pacetti's bill, C-302, which once again clearly corrects the wrong, recognizing the injustices that were done to persons of Italian origin during World War II by way of an apology in the House of Commons and providing for restitution and promoting education on Italian-Canadian history.

It is said that a nation can't forward until it recognizes its past. It's time. How long do we have to wait? Are we to be treated any differently than Japanese Canadians, than Chinese Canadians, than others? Let not the Italian community be treated any less. Education, as I mentioned before, is a central part.

The Italian-Canadian community has been resilient throughout these years. It has come together in many facets; be it with earthquake relief funds or many other tragedies, we are united as one. Let us work together and bear witness, by the passage of this bill, to turning the wrong into a right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia (President, Quebec Region, National Congress of Italian Canadians): My name is Antonio Sciascia. I'm the president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, Quebec region. I'm a governor of the Italian Canadian Community Foundation. In my capacity as past president of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, on two occasions I have been involved in this very specific issue, and many others, for the last 25 years.

Today I am speaking on behalf of the Italian Canadian Community Foundation established in 1975 with the mission to raise funds for the aid and advancement of the Italian Canadian community and society at large. I underline "society at large" because today the Italian Canadian foundation contributes most of the funds raised—and I must say they're in the millions of dollars—to non-Italian organizations, such as hospitals and other charitable organizations all over this country.

I underline this because the issue today is not one of money. We are not here for money; we are here to claim an apology for the Italian Canadians who suffered all the injustices during World War II.

•(1205)

[Translation]

We support Bill C-302 unreservedly. The foundation was one of the signatories to the agreement in principle signed by the

Government of Canada on November 5, 2005. When the Conservatives took office, we spent a number of years negotiating in vain with former Minister Oda, and our negotiations with the current Minister, Jason Kenney, have been equally fruitless. For reasons that are beyond me, Minister Kenney unilaterally decided to implement a new program that does not enjoy the support of the main Canadian Italian organizations.

[English]

The CHRP is an insult to our community for reasons that have already been communicated, as explained in the brief submitted on March 31, 2009, to the Honourable Jason Kenney, the minister. I draw your attention to the footnotes of this brief that give you a brief glimpse of a limited number of interventions by the national congress over the years. There are many, starting with the repatriation of the Constitution, the issue of the Multiculturalism Act, and the issue of immigration. On any issue that Parliament has dealt with, the national congress has made representation to the government.

On this particular issue of redress for internees, we have made representation to Parliament on several occasions. We go back to the early nineties, when we submitted a brief to the Prime Minister at the time called "A National Shame: The Internment of Italian Canadians". At the conclusion of a committee of the national congress that travelled across Canada, this brief was made to the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. Subsequent to that Mr. Mulroney did apologize before a banquet held by the congress in the CIBPA in Toronto, but this apology was never formalized.

As you know, this government apologized to the Chinese Canadians on the head tax. It apologized to the Japanese Canadians way back. It also settled this issue with the Ukrainian Canadians and gave the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation a \$10-million endowment fund, administered by the Ukrainians themselves.

Why is it that we are not able to administer this fund? The foundation has raised millions of dollars in the past for the three major earthquakes that affected Italy: in 1976 in Friuli; in 1980 when we raised \$12 billion and built homes for the people of Campania and Basilicata; and this year when we raised close to a million dollars for the people of Abruzzo. So we do not understand why we cannot administer a fund of \$10 million, \$12 million, or whatever it might be. However, the fund is not so important. At this point we want to correct the injustices of the past.

I agree that an apology will not solve everything, but at least it will make those people and those families who still remember... And if you spoke to people who went to those camps you would understand why an apology would undo the wrongs that were committed during World War II.

It's an issue of doing what is right, and who did what in the past is irrelevant. Two wrongs don't make a right, so let's rectify this injustice.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

●(1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next speaker.

Mr. Ciro Cucciniello (Board Member, Casa D'Italia): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Ciro Cucciniello. I was born in Montreal a little over 50 years ago. My father, Carmen Cucciniello, immigrated to Canada in 1953 from a village called Taverna la San Felice near Avellino, Italy. My mother immigrated in 1956, and they married here in Canada in 1957.

In 1982, while attending McGill law school, I was approached by law students of Italian-Canadian origin who spoke to me about this place called the Casa d'Italia, a community centre located at 505 Jean Talon Street East in Montreal. Their goal was to establish a legal aid clinic similar to the one operated by students at McGill University. However, it would address constituents of the Casa d'Italia. Something told me to explore this idea as a young law student.

At the Casa d'Italia I first met Sam Capozzi. He was the president of the Casa and a veteran of the Canadian special armed forces who served in Asia and the Pacific. He asked me a few questions about my family. He welcomed me and thanked me for volunteering my time to the community. Our discussions about the Casa d'Italia, the different waves of immigrants, where the Italians settled in Montreal and other Canadian cities led to stories about the integration of the Italian community and the Casa d'Italia in Canadian life.

Allow me to present to you a brief history of this 73-year-old institution and the backbone of our community since 1934.

In 1934 over 4,200 Montrealers donated between 10 cents and \$100 towards the fund to build the Casa d'Italia, a home away from home. The Casa d'Italia opened its doors on November 1, 1936. On June 12, 1940, on a surprise raid by the RCMP and the QPP, the Casa d'Italia property and its belongings were sequestered and its membership used to mop up the enemy aliens.

After the war and under the leadership of the then Montreal mayor, Camillien Houde, who, by the way, was interned with local Italian Canadians, a private member's bill, 174, was presented to the National Assembly requesting restitution of the property. As soon as the property was returned, the Casa d'Italia readied itself to support the largest wave of Italian immigration to Canada. The first meals and shelter, an employment office to find jobs, and French and English language courses were provided to the recent arrivals. I wish to underline the significant role the Casa played in the process of landed immigrants acquiring their Canadian citizenship.

For the record, the Casa d'Italia is the second-oldest membership-based institution after the Order the Sons of Italy. Many organizations were conceived within its walls, including the National Congress of Italian Canadians. As we speak, the vintage 1936 art deco building housing the Casa d'Italia is being restored and expanded to archive the Italian-Canadian community experience, provide pedagogical support for school outings, and allow people to discover the story of our integration into Canadian life. The project has, as part of its mission, the promotion and education of exemplary Italian Canadians, their history, and their story.

It was during Sam's history lessons that I learned about the internment of persons of Italian origin in Canada during World War II. I had never heard of the military camp Petawawa, which served as the prison. I was familiar with the matter of the internment of Japanese and Ukrainian Canadians, but I was quite surprised to learn about the internment of persons of Italian origin.

In 1983 Sam asked me to become a member of the board of directors of the Casa d'Italia. I attended meetings and was literally taken aback by the concerns, stories, and life experiences of some of our members on the board and their families.

I recall the late Senator Pietro Rizzuto coming to provide assistance to the Casa d'Italia. I remember John Turner telling me to listen to what Sam Capozzi had to say with regard to community service. I remember former Premier of Quebec Robert Bourassa speaking to us on the issue of internment, saying "don't worry, at the right time an apology will come". I remember Herbert Marx, the former Minister of Justice of Quebec, offering guidance at the invitation of Sam Capozzi on proceeding to obtain an official apology in an appropriate and dignified manner.

●(1215)

Many members of the board of the Casa d'Italia experienced Petawawa and its consequences. One of them was a fellow by the name of Gentile Dieni. He had been interned during World War II for his association with the Italian colony. Gentile Dieni represented a small but determined group of persons who wanted to get their due from the Canadian government for an injustice that had been perpetrated on them and their families.

I consistently heard that we, as Canadians of Italian origin, should request that the Government of Canada provide an apology to the families of those who were interned during World War II. I won't read section 3 of the act, but in my opinion and in the opinion of our constituency, it does just that. It clearly provides the apology that we, the members of the Italian community, have been requesting for so many years.

There are almost 300,000 Canadians of Italian origin in the greater Montreal area and over 600,000 Canadians of Italian origin in the greater Toronto area. There are close to 1.2 million Canadians of Italian origin in Canada today. Many of these Canadians and their children are paying particularly close attention to this bill.

Members of the community, including our business, professional, religious, and cultural groups, together with local Italian-Canadian media, see this bill as an opportunity for the Government of Canada and its members of Parliament, regardless of political stripe, to definitively correct a wrong. I believe that with the passing of the Italian-Canadian Recognition and Restitution Act, the Canadian government brings closure to what has been an open wound for many of us.

With respect to section 4, providing for restitution, I leave it to the best judgment of this government to determine an appropriate amount, if any, for community programs and educational materials. The constituency of the Casa d'Italia, which directly suffered the consequences of the enemy alien designation and internment, truly believes that the prime aspect of this act is the apology.

I wish to thank Massimo Pacetti, the member of Parliament for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, for bringing this bill forward, and the Government of Canada for bringing closure to this issue and for providing appropriate restitution in the circumstances. Mr. Chair, I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Pasquale Cobacci, secretary general of the Order Sons of Italy, and Angela Minicucci, board member of the Casa d'Italia.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Forcucci.

Mr. Fernando Forcucci (Immediate Past President, Order Sons of Italy of Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. My name is Fernando Forcucci, and I am the immediate past president of the Order Sons of Italy of Canada. I won't bore you with too many details, just a few.

As stated by many honourable members of the Canadian government, this bill is not just about Italians. It is about making a wrong into a right for all Canadians, because most of those interned were Canadian citizens. Canadians of Italian origin like me are made to feel like second-class citizens by my government, which chooses to apologize to other ethnic Canadians, such as the Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians, but not to the Italian Canadians.

I've been involved with this file for about 20 years. The spring of 2005 was fantastic for the Italian community, because the government of the day announced that it was willing to resolve this file. After months of negotiation, and with our community united, in November 2005 an agreement in principle was signed by the Canadian government and the four senior organizations: the National Congress of Italian Canadians, the Order Sons of Italy, CIBPA, and La Fondation Communautaire Canadienne-Italienne du Québec.

It was announced that an agreement was reached in principle under the ACE program, which provided for a full settlement in the sum of \$12.5 million, which was to be administered for the Italian community by the NCIC foundation. To date, the community is still waiting. We have met with many honourable members of the present government to try to resolve this file, but to no avail. In June 2006, the government of the day eliminated the entire ACE agreement without consulting the Italian community, and it created the CHR program.

Furthermore, the administration of funds is by Canadian Heritage under CHRP, whereas the Japanese Canadians and Ukrainian Canadians administer their own funds. Does this government not trust our community? Again, I and my community feel like second-class Canadians.

As the immediate past president of the Order Sons of Italy of Canada, and as a member of one of the oldest national organizations in Canada—it was founded in 1915—I and the Order Sons of Italy fully support Bill C-302 and sincerely hope that the file will bring closure to the Italian internment issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1220)

The Chair: I think that is it for speakers on the bill.

You have the first question, Mr. Rodriguez.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that we have with us today some of the most eminent representatives of the Italian community, people who are highly respected and who carry out impressive work. I would like to thank them for joining us here today.

Mr. Chairman, I would also ask you to ensure that the members of the committee treat the witnesses with respect. I did not appreciate the way in which you chaired the first round of questions, allowing the Conservatives to make five-minute speeches, leaving no time for the witnesses to respond. These people are here today to talk to us, and I hope that, regardless of what they do in life, they will be given the opportunity to say everything they have to say.

I have a quick question for all of the witnesses. Please give a yes or no answer: do you support the bill?

Voices: Yes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: There is unanimous agreement.

[English]

Just for the record, all these important groups are supporting this bill. The other day CIBPA said it was supporting this bill.

[Translation]

Help me to understand something. If all of the major associations—associations which furthermore enjoy a good working relationship—support this bill, how can it be said to divide the community, as the government claims?

Perhaps, you can answer, Mr. Sciascia.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: It is not the bill that divides the community, it is the Community Historical Recognition Program which has caused such a rift within the community, because people are unaware of its existence.

Two senators came to visit Quebec City two weeks ago. At that meeting, no one was aware of the existence of such a program. Is it a program that was designed strictly for Toronto? We are wondering.

This program makes no sense because the members appointed to the representative committees in no way represent the Italian Canadian community. Not at all! If you look at the members' resumé's, you can see that they were never involved in the cases of people interned during the Second World War.

I do not know how the minister operates nor why he decided to shut out the organizations that have represented the community for the last 35 years, and even up to 100 years in some cases.

How did he decide to put aside these organizations and appoint people who are in absolutely no way representative?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you. I must interrupt you, because I have very little time, I only have five minutes.

Mr. Colavecchio, I believe you wanted to add something.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: I wanted to add something and answer a question that Ms. Lavallée asked Mr. Pacetti earlier on. In fact, the question was who administers the funds, and I believe there is a connection to your question, Mr. Rodriguez.

The National Congress of Italian Canadians made commitments at the outset. I headed up those negotiations for almost two years. We made a commitment at the outset to ensure that all funds that would be paid out would be administered by the board of a foundation that would represent all the community associations. It was not restrictive, we were open to it. We named the four main associations, but we were not restrictive.

We did not wonder whether or not these funds would be managed by the National Congress of Italian Canadians, as the funds were to be managed by the Italian community represented by a foundation made up of the major community organizations.

If there was any attempt to divide the community, it did not come from our side. It did not come from the community. In fact, I challenge the members of this committee to find any aspects of the bill that the community does not agree with. It is—

•(1225)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Then I would like to understand the following: in your opinion, if this bill is important to you, why can the community not manage the funds? Why does it have to be done by the other organization?

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: From our perspective, it has been clear from the beginning. We believe and we are convinced that we have a foundation that is able to take in the funds. During the last general meeting of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, we voted in favour of a proposal to open the board to other associations. We do not believe there is any problem in managing that, and Mr. Sciascia proved that in his comments. We have managed much larger amounts than that in the past.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That is also what I believe.

Last week, representatives of the Italian-Canadian Community Advisory Committee appeared and told us that they were here to represent the minister. Then they told us they were here to do their work. I asked them what their work was, but I never got an answer.

What is their work?

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: It is an advisory committee for the Community Historical Recognition Program. In fact, the Italian-Canadian Community Advisory Committee does not represent any organization.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I have to end it there.

Go ahead, Ms. Lavallée.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Let us carry on in the same vein, because I asked the question of the Italian-Canadian Community Advisory

Committee. That is the name appearing on the official documents. Who plays the leadership role in Canada? Their answer was no one.

Is the leadership role actually played by the National Congress of Italian Canadians?

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: I believe Mr. Sciascia can demonstrate that fact.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: The National Congress of Italian Canadians has been taking concrete actions since 1972. If you do your homework, you will see that the first agreement signed between Quebec and Italy was a reciprocal agreement on pensions. The congress negotiated that agreement and was instrumental in getting it signed.

Following that, there was the repatriation of the Constitution. The National Congress of Italian Canadians tabled the brief in favour of the repatriation of the Constitution, and afterwards, we also took a position on multiculturalism. Tons of briefs were prepared and tabled with Parliament on every aspect of life, not only the aspect of—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I want to move quickly. You understand that I have other questions to ask you. Does the congress play a leadership role within the Italian community? Answer me with a yes or no.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Yes, absolutely, without a doubt.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: You all agree? Mr. Forcucci, do you agree?

Mr. Fernando Forcucci: Yes.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Campione, do you agree? Does the congress play a leadership role, yes or no?

Mr. Dominic Campione: Yes.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Dominic Campione: It's very important, though, and I only have two seconds, if I may.

During all the negotiations that happened after the agreement in principle, the contact or point of reference of the government was the National Congress of Italian Canadians. We were talking and we were building. We had that consensus and we involved every single signatory in our discussions.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Another thing was said behind the scenes: it was said by some that it was not worth compensating the Italians who were interned because in any case, they were fascists. I will allow you to answer, one at a time.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: As you know, it is very easy to label people. Earlier on I gave the example of one Canadian, Mr. Capobianco, who was working for an MP and was nevertheless interned. Labelling people in that way is dangerous. We are talking about people, workers, retailers and professionals who worked within the Italian community and were members of community associations. There was no politics in these groups.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Sciascia, would you like to say anything?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Look, this is fantasy. Most of these people, as Mr. Forcucci has already stated, were Canadians of Italian origin. For the most part, they were workers, people—

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: ... who were not concerned with politics.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: You also have to take into account the context that existed at that time. From 1936 to 1940, who was in power in Italy? Sir Winston Churchill was a great admirer of Mr. Mussolini, that is what history tells us. All of this has to be put into context. We must not forget that the government in power at that time was Mr. Mussolini's.

• (1230)

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Cucciniello, do you wish to speak?
[English]

Mr. Ciro Cucciniello: My first-year law professor was Professor Cotler, who happens to be my member of Parliament today. Coincidence happens. We learned a little about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as students and we tried to apply that later in life.

I think freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, is something that you should have. I think our nation has evolved from the principle of labelling someone and associating someone with a label, and I don't think what someone is called is what we're here to discuss today. This bill deals with an apology. It deals with trying to bring closure to the past and moving on, things we've done in other communities.

Gentile Dieni, who was on our board, had fascist beliefs. I sat next to him at many meetings. He was still a good person who believed in family, who believed in work, who believed in many aspects of the Canadian community and the Canadian reality. He may have had a different political belief. I think we all respect other people's political beliefs; at least, I hope we do in this building. If we label someone a fascist or otherwise, we should remember that we've probably had communists walk into this building in the past and be greeted probably right in Parliament. I don't think putting labels on people is the object of what we're trying to do here.

We're trying to get an apology that is justly due to families that represent more than one million Canadians today. The labelling aspect, I think and hope, is something of the past. Someone's beliefs are someone's beliefs. I think that by passing this bill, we're going to capture the central issue, which is to bring an apology, get closure, and then deal in a dignified and proper manner with the issue of restitution. That's what this is about.

The Chair: Thank you. We have to move on.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you very much.

It's great to have you gentlemen before us. I will echo what my Liberal colleague said at the beginning, and I'd have to make an addendum to it-. You probably do represent a cross-section of the most credible Italian organizations in the country, except the Dante Club in Timmins isn't here, so I want to put that on the record, because they've been representing our community since the war, and many of those families were involved at the time of internment.

My colleague asked what there is to apologize for. It wasn't just internment. They were subject to physical harassment. We had militia going through the streets pulling people out of their homes,

beating them up. That's a historical fact. People were fired from their jobs. The time has come, so let's get it done.

Now, that being said, I have to admit, and you have probably figured this out, I'm just a mangia-cake from northern Ontario, so I don't know all the groups. I'm trying to work out the problem with this bill. I read the bill. It seems fairly straightforward. My Conservative colleague read a statement from Brian Mulroney, and I think that's great, we're all done. But then they start saying this is divisive and this is an attempt to divide the community. Then I see unanimity here.

So I want to make sure everybody here is on the same page.

Mr. Sciascia, you wrote a letter on March 31 to Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, and you said: "Your plan of action announced...under the Community Historical Recognition Program has no legitimacy and simply does not make any sense."

You went on further to explain your attempts to have this issue addressed through the years:

Unfortunately, after years of negotiations the Government chose to cancel the ACE Agreement and replaced it with a new program

....

For all of the above we submit that by-passing the legitimate community organizations who have been negotiating with the Government in good faith is simply misguided and unacceptable.

We sincerely hope, Mr. Kenney, that you legitimize the process by dealing with those who represent the community and have been working for over 20 years on the issue of internment.

In default thereof, we will have no other alternative than to urge the NCIC to mobilize our community from coast to coast and take all the necessary measures to denounce this unacceptable program proposed by the CHRP.

Clearly, those are strong words. Do we have unanimity?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Yes, they are. For your information, many letters of protest were sent to Minister Kenney from all parts of the country, from all the chapters of the National Congress of Italian Canadians, from the east to the west. They all sent letters to the minister and never received a reply.

• (1235)

Mr. Charlie Angus: No reply.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: I have not received any reply.

Misguided? Yes. We considered very seriously taking action against the government on the breach of the ACE agreement. For reasons that would be too long to explain, we decided not to because it would seem to be a political move against the government, and most members of the committee decided that it would not be wise to sue the government on the breach of the ACE agreement.

A draft of the action was prepared, but we chose not to proceed with it. We chose to continue the negotiations with the government, with Minister Bev Oda, with Minister Kenney, only to be insulted, only to be put aside when they came up with this program, which had never been discussed, had never been approved by anyone, with people on this consultative committee. I have to mention, one of the members of this committee is a professor. He was here, I believe, on Thursday. This particular professor Roberto Perin wrote a book called *Enemies Within*. For him, these people who were arrested were enemies of Canada, and he suggests they were all fascists and perhaps they deserved the treatment they received. This is the person who is being placed on such a committee? That's a double insult to the Italian community.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you for that explanation. I was, again, confused.

The Chair: Very short, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: My friend Mr. Calandra suggested this was some kind of Liberal conspiracy to make the government look bad in a minority Parliament. Now, I love Liberal conspiracies as much as the next guy, but I've seen from your letters that you were involved in this long before this group of guys came along. So you're telling me you have a long legitimate history, you've been involved in negotiations, and they just walked away on it?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Absolutely, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

Thank to you to our witnesses.

I guess I'll start with a little bit of a recap, because I think some of what has gone on has been factually challenged. Statements that were made about my position and that of my government are in fact not accurate.

I want to be clear. My family's history in Canada began at Pier 21 in Halifax in 1927. My grandfather got a job with CP Rail. They moved him to a little town called Britt, near Parry Sound. That's where my father was born. He suffered a severe accident working in sub-standard working conditions, because they weren't given the good jobs, they were just given jobs. He lost one leg and nearly died. He came back from that through the use of a prosthetic limb and worked as long as he could there. He repaired locomotives, but he had to get a different job because he was physically incapable of doing it with his prosthetic limb. He passed a test in English that he was forced to take in order to become a porter. He didn't have a lot of formal education. He was not fluent in English from a literary perspective. In fact, my wife would tell you that his English was pretty tough to understand. I got it. He did that and he passed it.

He became a porter and worked until he was seventy years old and cried like a baby the day they made him retire. The only other time I ever saw him cry was when my grandmother died. They lived through this. They lived through this mess. My father's name was Enrico Giuseppe. I never knew it until I was twelve years old and saw his birth certificate. I thought his name was Henry Joseph, and he went by "Hank." My family lived this stuff. It matters. What happened to the Italian community was wrong. It was wrong.

The fact that it happened in this country is remarkable, but this country is not perfect. We've made a lot of mistakes, and frankly we have never adequately acknowledged that. Growing up as a kid, I didn't have that understanding. I think the immigration guide that new immigrants to Canada now have to read reflects this fact. The test they will now have to pass reflects the fact that this country is not perfect, that this country has made mistakes.

This was a major transgression. I want to make that clear.

I want to go to a couple of comments that were made.

Mr. Campione, you said that the Italian community is proud and united, but Mr. Sciascia, you indicated that the members on CHRP do not represent the community, that there's no support from the main groups for CHRP. So how can we reconcile that the Italian community is proud and united? By the way, the Italian-Canadian community is most certainly proud to be Canadian, and most certainly proud of its roots. How can we square that circle and say that we're united, but these groups over here, this is an insult that these Italian Canadians have stepped up to represent us, because they don't represent Italians? How can we make that distinction?

● (1240)

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Mr. Del Mastro, if you look at the three members that were before you and you look at their *curricula vitae*, and you look at what they have done for the community for the last 35 years, you will have your answer.

These people have never dealt with this issue, with the exception of Professor Perin, who wrote a book, as I mentioned before. I think you should read the book. From the history of your family that you are telling us, you will not be very proud to read that book.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: What I'm asking is how can these two things both be true? How can you say you're united behind these issues, but don't listen to these people, because they're not part of—

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: You have at this table the major organizations that represent the Italian-Canadian community. You have them at this table, Mr. Del Mastro. What you had the other day I don't think had the same representativeness. The only one that was here that represents part of the community, the business and professional members, is the CIBPA, and the CIBPA is part of the four people that signed the agreement.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: Perhaps I may add something.

I'm not here to judge the qualities of the people who are on that committee, but notwithstanding that, the biggest problem was that in the midst of negotiations with the government, of meetings that were being held with ministers on a regular basis, someone decided to do an end-run against the organizations that were involved in the process. They turned around, created a program, and named three people who had had nothing to do with this process, to supposedly handle these funds.

This is where the insult is to the community organizations that have been working for the community for 25, 30, 40, and in some cases 75 years. This is where the insult came from the government—that we're negotiating, we don't seem to be getting where we want to go with this, so let's do an end-run and find other people to negotiate with.

The Chair: I have to move on to Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: First I want to say a couple of things, and I think this is important. We all know people who were interned. One I knew was a professor at the University of Toronto until he retired. Many of you would know Johnny Lombardi, the radio broadcaster. Johnny went to war. This is the weird stuff, right? Johnny was born here and he went to war for Canada, but when he went he was asked where he came from. He said Canada, that he was born here. They insisted that he tell them his origins, and he said his parents were of Italian origin. They said that in that case he was Italian. His comment to me was that he went to war as an Italian born in Canada. He couldn't be a Canadian—that was not acceptable. That shows the kind of weird stuff that was going on.

Mr. Del Mastro talked about former prime ministers. Yes, they were wrong, but two wrongs don't make a right. I think we need to say that clearly here. I never have misgivings about that.

The other thing was about the first at the table. It was Paul Martin with \$12.5 million. The fact is that the agreement was made, the election took place, and that didn't happen. But this government had the choice of continuing to negotiate with the community and chose to break it off.

We all know that you can go into any community and identify two or three people who are not connected and encourage them to divide and conquer. You can always do that. That's easy to do. We all know that around this table. Let's not mince words. The reality is the government chose to ignore the community and to go to a group of people who did not have the history or the ability to manage. Of course, the money is not \$12.5 million.

Mr. Stante, were you part of the negotiations on the \$12.5 million? Was there a clear understanding that this was a commitment on the government side?

• (1245)

Mr. Michael Stante: There was a commitment of \$12.5 million to be disbursed over a period of five years.

Hon. Maria Minna: I want to go to anyone of you who wants to answer. The program that exists now, the CHRP program, what did Mr. Kenney tell you was his rationale for establishing it? Has he ever given you a specific answer about why that was established?

Mr. Dominic Campione: The CHRP program was announced in Parliament in June 2006. Immediately after the election of the Conservative government, I wrote to the prime minister, asking about his position with respect to honouring the agreement, and also asking for an apology. He had promised an apology to the Chinese community during the election campaign. In June 2006, without our knowledge, in the House, the announcement of the CHRP came on its own. We were not advised or consulted.

Hon. Maria Minna: Did Mr. Kenney ever explain why?

Mr. Dominic Campione: Why it was....

Hon. Maria Minna: Why they chose to go in that direction.

Mr. Dominic Campione: No, there was no reason given.

Hon. Maria Minna: To this day you've not received any explanation.

Mr. Dominic Campione: No.

Hon. Maria Minna: Do you know of any reason for that?

Mr. Dominic Campione: No.

Hon. Maria Minna: I just wanted to make that clear.

It's important to note that the Italian-Canadian community is represented by organizations. I was a member of an organization called COSTI.

Given that you're all here and you are all in agreement, what would be the immediate next step that you want to see for this committee and for the government to do?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: The immediate thing would be an apology. Restitution is not the most important thing. Two weeks ago, our community foundation organized an activity, a ball, and we raised \$1.4 million. So money is not the issue.

Hon. Maria Minna: Nonetheless, Mr. Sciascia, my assumption would be that there should be a fund to address the situation with respect to—

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Yes, there should be—

Mr. Dominic Campione: We want the committee, the House, to approve the bill and then proceed. The foundation is already in place. In fact, a resolution has been passed as to who is going to sit on that NCIC foundation. There are members—

Hon. Maria Minna: Okay. So you have the infrastructure in place—

Mr. Dominic Campione: The infrastructure is in place.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Minna.

Mr. Pomerleau, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Personally, I have no problem recognizing that you are the true representatives of the Italian community. I think that the people who came here did in fact represent some kangaroo committee more or less set up by the government for their own reasons that I do not wish to know about for the moment. The National Congress of Italian Canadians, Casa D'Italia, we have heard about these for 50 years. That is the Italian community.

However, I find one thing surprising when I see you all sitting here. Do you also represent women? There is not a single woman among you. If one exists, she should also be sitting here.

[*English*]

Mr. Fernando Forcucci: Sons of Italy president is a lady, Ms. Josie Cumbo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Very well. She should have come along. It seems a little strange. All of the other groups have at least one woman in them.

[English]

Mr. Dominic Campione: Just to mention this, there were also four women who were interned, and we do have women on our committee at the National Congress of Italian Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: There are four women on our board of directors.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Well, bring them along.

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: We represent the past.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Sciascia, you have said on a number of occasions that money is not the issue, that an apology in the House of Commons is what really counts. Would you accept an amendment to the bill to withdraw the provisions on compensation?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: We support the bill. What I was driving at is that money is not a priority for us. It is an apology that matters. It is about atoning for the errors of the past. Money is secondary. However, if we really want to correct the errors of the past, we need programs to educate Canadians about Canada's history. And the Italians are part of this history.

• (1250)

[English]

The Chair: We'll hear from Mr. Del Mastro for a short question, and then from Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you very much.

I actually want to go back to where Madam Lavallée was. I made the assertion that most of the problems associated with CHRP had to do with the dollar figure involved with CHRP, that it wasn't seen to be enough money.

We have a number of things in the bill like the direction for a stamp to be created and so forth, and I understand that the member who brought in the bill has indicated that he would be open to removing this. I think that's good. It was problematic. I think there's consensus around that.

If this is just about an apology, if it's just about getting an apology in the House, why wouldn't you support just amending the bill such that it calls for an apology in the House?

Mr. Nino Colavecchio: There are two aspects to the historical

[Translation]

claims our community is making on this front.

[English]

One of them was, of course, the apology, and there was an aspect of redress. I think that when the ACE agreement was reached—and I go back to that because it's an agreement that did reach a consensus within the community—there was a financial aspect.

I think what everyone is trying to say here is that the Italian community does not require funds for its survival. We're not here for a handout, not at all, but what we are talking about is that if we are going to embark on a project of educating, of commemorating, and of making sure that this type of situation gets recognized as what happened, there has to be an educational process.

That is why we wholeheartedly support Bill C-302, in that the honourable member, when he proposed this bill, included the fact that this fund would be purely educational. In other words, we are not in a process of bricks and mortar here. What we want to establish is an educational program, which of course would have to be done with the entire community, so when we say the money is not important, what we're trying to say is that it's not like the Italian community requires this for its survival.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: No, and I understand that completely. I just wanted to make the point that everybody's saying that this is about the apology but the money's not important. The money is most definitely a stumbling block, because there's \$5 million on the table and the national congress doesn't want to work with it.

I'll pass the rest off to Mr. Calandra. I did promise I'd share my time with Mr. Calandra and I have to pass it off to him.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Dominic, you're excited to speak, so I'll let you speak. With respect to the money aspect—

Mr. Dominic Campione: Am I a classified Italian because I don't support this bill?

Mr. Paul Calandra: I didn't hear the first part.

Mr. Dominic Campione: Am I any less a proud Italian Canadian because I don't support the bill?

Mr. Paul Calandra: That's your own personal conscience.

Mr. Dominic Campione: Yes or no, what do you think?

Mr. Ciro Cucciniello: To me, no.

Mr. Dominic Campione: How about you, Antonio?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: I have no problem with that. Absolutely not. I respect your position.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Let me ask you, Antonio, if I can.

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: I do have to say I regret that you do have that opinion, because I don't think you understand what's happened to this community. I don't think you've met the people who have suffered in these concentration camps. I don't think you relate to the families—

Mr. Paul Calandra: Sorry, I have a limited time and I have a couple of questions.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Put your hands up. Who's from B.C.?

A voice: No one's from B.C.

A voice: We have a very active chapter in B.C.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Manitoba?

A voice: Manitoba, yes.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Saskatchewan?

Territories?

Any of the Atlantic provinces?

Ontario?

A voice: Ontario, yes.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Quebec?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Paul Calandra: So, Antonio, you said that only people who have served on organizations can represent the community. That's what you said earlier. My father was in this country. My uncle, my aunts, have all been in this country and worked very hard. They are not members of your association. My father has passed away. What's the total membership in all your organizations combined? Is it 100,000 Italians?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Two million.

Mr. Paul Calandra: How much is your membership?

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Listen, we have 1.5 million Italian Canadians.

• (1255)

The Chair: There's a point of order over here.

A voice: Can I answer that question?

The Chair: There's a point of order over here, please.

Madame Lavallée.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: I would ask Mr. Calandra to treat these eminent Italian Canadians, our guests, with more respect.

[*English*]

The Chair: A point of order, Ms. Minna, and then Mr. Del Mastro.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I need to be clear. The membership is through organizations, not directly to the congress. This is an umbrella organization. The organization I was the president of, involved with for 20 years, COSTI, \$31 million, Canada's largest immigrant service agency, with all of their members, is a member of the congress as an organization. This has to be clear.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: That was my question, Mr. Chair—the total membership of all of the organizations put together.

The Chair: Mr. Del Mastro, we're getting a little out of order. We only have a half a minute left for Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Del Mastro has a point of order.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: There is nothing inappropriate with Mr. Calandra asking them to give the number of members, not the size of the Italian diaspora—I know what that is in Canada—but the number of members. We have heard testimony from the witnesses that the people who are cooperating with CHRP, who are working on the historical recognition program, are not representative of the Italian community. How can you make that assertion if you don't represent 100% of the Italian community? That's the point.

The Chair: A point of order has been made.

Is it a point of order, Madam Lavallée?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: It is about my point of order, Mr. Chairman, concerning Mr. Calandra's lack of respect for our guests and Mr. Del Mastro's answer.

Members are free to ask any question they want, but they have to do so in a respectful manner.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think I heard nothing disrespectful and I go to Mr. Calandra to clarify his question, if he would, please.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Chair, I know you said I have 30 seconds left, so I'm going to move on.

My point was that I don't believe that all those Italians who are not members of your organizations in total are any less responsible or any less Italian or any less deserving of being represented because they're not members of your organization.

Let me ask this one last question. I'm going to assume, and I know you all do, that the office of the Prime Minister... It's safe to say that you all respect the office of the Prime Minister. So when the Prime Minister of Canada says "This kind of behaviour was not then, is not now, and never will be acceptable in a civilized nation that purports to respect the rule of law, and on behalf of the Government and people of Canada, I offer a full and unqualified apology for the wrongs done to our fellow Canadians of Italian origin during World War II", how can you not—

Mr. Antonio Sciascia: Why don't you do it in Parliament? Do it in Parliament.

Mr. Paul Calandra: How can you not respect that if you accept and respect the office of the Prime Minister?

The Chair: Thank you.

We've got two minutes left, and I'm going to leave it to our witness to respond.

Mr. Michael Stante: Very briefly, I don't see how the Italian community should accept any less than the apology that was given to other communities, and that is an apology in the House of Commons. It's something that isn't new to this government. We've been asking for this for many years, and even following then Prime Minister Mulroney's statement.

And you referred to these three members who are not members of our organization. In fact, they are members of the congress. They are. We can actually tell you those three people are members of the national congress. What Mr. Sciascia said, in fact, was that they were not people who were involved in this process for the past 20 years. So I would beg to ask the question of you, why would the government choose to name three people to a committee that is so important to the resolution of this issue, if that's what it believes, who have had absolutely nothing to do with the process in over 20 years? Why would you do that?

The Chair: Okay, I think the point's been made, the questions have been asked.

The meeting is adjourned.

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