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TO GO OR TO STAY

A Study of Decision-Making by Italian Workers  
and Their Families in Turangi

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ABSTRACT

With the termination of their contracts on the Tongariro Power Development in 1982-83, Italian workers in Turangi were faced with the problem of deciding whether to return to Italy, stay in New Zealand or go elsewhere. All had permanent residence status and were entitled to stay. This study is concerned with the problems surrounding decision making and what influenced some to decide to return to Italy, some to become permanent settlers in New Zealand, while yet others found any decision making difficult.

Orthodox theories of migration were inadequate for the examination of the problem. Italians had not made conscious decisions to migrate permanently to New Zealand. Yet some had become permanent settlers and others had that intention in 1982. The problem was examined as one of commitment. How had some Italians become committed to New Zealand, others remained committed to Italy while others had conflicting commitments? Two areas of commitment were of special importance in decision making, the material and the sentimental.

Two thirds of the Italian men in the study had a commitment to New Zealand wives. This alone was not sufficient for them to become committed to permanent residence here. If they had property in New Zealand, or/and if they spoke English well, the likelihood of a commitment to stay in New Zealand increased.

Those who had strong commitments in Italy, to family and in investments in real estate, returned there. A return was more likely if they were married to an Italian and did not speak English well. However for many, commitments were not so clearly defined. Commitments frequently conflicted, contributing to indecision about the future. Indecision was not easily resolved. In some cases supposedly final decisions changed as new circumstances resulted in compromises or modifications of plans.

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