

## Ousting Balbo Avenue Push carts businesses in Federal Hill 1937



Our lead photo above shows Pushcart Row on Balbo Avenue, between Atwells Avenue and Spruce Street, on April 4, 1937.

Today, as so many commenters's noted, Balbo Avenue is De Pasquale Plaza. The Woolworth's building on the left is the side of Costantino's Venda Ravioli today:



PROVIDENCE JOURNAL PHOTO / SANDOR BODO

**De Pasquale Plaza, the former Balbo Avenue.**

The Providence Journal closely tracked a municipal effort to oust the Balbo Avenue pushcart peddlers over ten months in 1937 and 1938, from the order to move through the peddlers' reactions: organize, gather signatures, demonstrate, move in despair, sit in at the mayor's office and finally return victorious.

**April 4, 1937: out of the blue decision by Alderman Luongo**



PROVIDENCE JOURNAL PHOTOS

"One of the main attractions for housewives is Push cart Row, on Balbo Avenue, which comes each morning and goes each night. Alderman Thomas S. Luongo wants to move the row somewhere else in face of the united opposition of the peddlers and their customers. These pictures were taken yesterday (1937) afternoon during a rush-hour period, and, at the top, show a woman who has found a bunch of celery she likes. The woman to the right of the purchaser is operating the pushcart, while her husband is at work elsewhere."

Here's the man who started it all, powerful City Councilman Thomas S. Luongo of the Thirteenth Ward. The day before these photos, the Bureau of Police and Fire had announced it was considering his request to remove the pushcart peddlers from their longtime spot on Balbo Avenue. Luongo, wearing the same three-piece suit, stands near a bag of onions, looking right into the camera, in our lead photo.

His plan was to relocate the peddlers to much narrower Spruce Street, and permit angled and parallel public parking on opposite sides of Balbo Avenue. He said the peddlers were in violation of a forgotten 1909 law that required assigned spaces and rental fees for vendors, although they had for years operated without such a system.

Albert Muratore, president of the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Protective Association, would later charge, "**It was not because he wanted to improve traffic conditions... He wanted more parking spaces for his sister's ice cream parlor**" -- there's a "Creamery" sign faintly visible in the background above.

**April 14, 1937: What you need to know**

## ***Removal Threat Rouses Federal Hill Peddlers***

**Alderman Luongo's Proposal to Shunt Balbo  
Street Pushcart Owners Opposed by  
Head of Merchants' Group**

This is the main story, the explainer, the background: What the peddlers' lives are like, who they are, how they now "seethed with resentment reminiscent of the furor which the police provoked years ago when they forced these vendors each day to 'race for positions'."

**April 17, 1937: Sign the petition against the Providence Town Council**



Peddlers gathered and organized a petition against the Town Council decision.

## Recruit: The Pushcart Protest



Fifteen-year-old Joseph Muratore is leading the protest against the removal of pushcarts from Balbo avenue. A Central High School student and the son of a pushcart peddler, Muratore today circularized Federal Hill with petitions of protest and was photographed as he watched Frank Gorofoll, for 24 years a peddler, sign the petition against Alderman Thomas Luongo's plan to shunt the carts off the street.

### SCHOOLBOY LEADS PUSHCART BATTLE

Gets Up Petition to Give to  
Mayor When Father is  
Faced With Ouster.

Balbo avenue pushcart peddlers, faced with the threat of removal to

### SCHOOLBOY LEADS PUSHCART BATTLE

Continued from Page 1.

after serving in the Italian army in the World War, is one of the avenue's 40-odd pushcart peddlers. Joseph said last night his fight to save the Balbo avenue site is for his father and all the others.

#### Sees Relief Peril

Joseph said he feared not only that his father would have to walk the city's streets if the Luongo request is granted by the Bureau of Police and Fire, but even that his father might



**April 22, 1937: 3,000+ signatures delivered at the center of Balbo Avenue**

# PUSHCART MEN APPEAL TO MAYOR

Boy, 15, and Counsel Act as  
Spokesmen in Federal  
Hill Case.

Accompanied by Joseph Muratore, 15-year-old Central high school sophomore, and Albert A. Soriero, its counsel, as spokesmen, a committee of 10 of the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Protective Association this morning visited Mayor James E. Dunne to present petitions that Alderman Thomas S. Luongo's request for removal of the pushcarts from Balbo avenue be denied.

The high school boy presented the mayor with signatures of "more than 3000 friends" of the pushcart peddlers who support their stand.

Mayor Dunne said he would take the petitions and request under advisement and urged the committee to request a hearing from the Bureau of Police and Fire. "I was under the

impression," the mayor said, "that you had requested a hearing of the bureau. My advice is that you do so and I hope these differences can be ironed out amicably for both sides."

Former Representative Soriero, first to approach the mayor, spoke briefly. He outlined the controversy and asked the mayor's co-operation in defence of the pushcart men.

Muratore, whose brother Anthony, is president of the association, and whose father, Sebastian, is one of the oldest peddlers on the Hill, gave the Mayor papers bearing the signatures of "3000 Italo-Americans, Irish-Americans and Americans of other racial origin who shop on the Hill and who support our claims."

"If Alderman Luongo's request for removal of pushcarts is granted," Joseph said, "our means of livelihood will be destroyed. Many of these men and their families will be thrown on relief and may have to appeal to you, your honor, for aid. Pushcarts have been allowed on Balbo avenue for years, please help us keep them there."

Among those in the delegation were: Frank Garofalo, Joseph Di-Costanza, Vincent Pannoza, Joseph Ceresi, Anthony Muratore, president; Alfred Tomaselli, Emilio Fracassa, Frank Sasso, Charles Comello and Leo Garofalo.

**"Our means of livelihood will be destroyed if Luongo's request is granted"**  
said 15 year old Central High School sophomore Joseph Muratore

May 5, 1937: Demonstration of support for peddlers

## *They Gave Mr. Luongo "The Works"*



Fifteen hundred pushcart peddlers and their sympathizers gathered on Balbo avenue last night and all but dissected Alderman Thomas S. Luongo for his attempt to move the peddlers off the avenue. In this picture Albert A. Soriero, counsel for the peddlers, is shouting: "Before election Alderman Luongo was your friend, now he seeks to ruin your business."

"Before election Alderman Luongo was your friend, now he seeks to ruin your business" shouted Albert Soriero!

# PUSHCART MEN FIGHT REMOVAL

Storm Hearing Room at Police  
Headquarters to Oppose  
Luongo Proposal.

Supported by members of their families, relatives and friends, representatives of the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Protective Association, this afternoon stormed the hearing room in municipal police court to protest against the petition of Alderman Thomas S. Luongo of the 13th Ward to remove them from Balbo avenue. The hearing was before the Bureau of Police and Fire.

Carrying with them the support of more than 1500 sympathizers who attended a rally on "the avenue" last night, the speakers roundly scored the attempt of the ward leader to shunt them to another street on "the hill."

## Cella Scores Change

A former leader in the Federal Hill district, Dr. Louis J. Cella, for a number of years Republican Alderman in the old Ninth Ward, voiced his protest against the petition of Alderman Luongo, declaring that the pushcart peddlers have become an institution in the Federal Hill district and they have served the purpose of affording residents of the district fresh products at reasonable costs.

Chairman Thomas H. Roberts of the Bureau of Police and Fire presided at the meeting, with Commissioners Benjamin P. Moulton and Joseph C. Sunclo sitting with him. A patrolman was on duty in the courtroom.

## Luongo Statement

In a statement issued as the hearing opened, Alderman Luongo called his plan "basically sound."

The peddlers, he said, have no legal "inherent rights" to their present situation and have "been tolerated" on Balbo avenue.

The peddlers' presence is not injurious to "the business or welfare of others," and on the contrary is felt

Continued on Page 10, Col. 4.

## PUSHCART MEN FIGHT REMOVAL

Continued from Page 1.

to stimulate trade on Balbo avenue, Mr. Luongo admitted.

But the facts remain, Mr. Luongo said that the presence of the peddlers make a real fire hazard on Balbo avenue, and that Balbo avenue will not be "an accessible roadway" if the peddlers remain after the City Council extends Balbo avenue through to Broadway, as is now under consideration.

Mr. Luongo told the Bureau he favored a spot on Federal Hill for the peddlers wherever the Bureau feels they may be allowed in consonance with public safety.

## June 10, 1937 (long story shorter): Doors slam shut

The Bureau of Police and Fire ruled that the peddlers must leave Balbo Avenue by Oct. 1. On Sept. 1 the Bureau would extend the deadline to Dec. 31. Many officious words were spoken along the way.

**December 31, 1937: Gone tomorrow**



“On Sproosa Street you find Francisco?’ That was Francisco Sasso's hopeful query yesterday as he said goodbye to Manuel Cabral, patron of Francisco's Balbo Avenue Pushcart for 18 Years. Today Francisco (Left) moves with other Push carters from Balbo Avenue to Spruce Street, by Direction of the Board of Police and Fire.”

January 2, 1938: Out of business

Members of the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Association, ordered from their stands on Balbo avenue under a ruling of the Bureau of Police and Fire which became effective on New Year's Day, today made known plans for obtaining the site of the Atwells avenue primary school for a municipal market.

Asserting they were virtually driven out of business by the edict, delegates representing the 63 pushcart owners, pleaded with the Bureau today for an extension of time "or revocation of the order" until more definite plans for installing them in a municipal market site have been completed. During the hearing a vigorous attack on Alderman Thomas S. Longo was made by the spokesman for the pushcart owners.

Placing before the Bureau a petition signed by more than a score of residents and business men on Spruce street, set aside as a site for the pushcart vendors, opposing the presence of the pushcarts on that street, the delegates declared, "We don't want to intrude where we are not wanted. We are law-abiding and stand ready to submit to the authority of the law."

Anthony G. Muratore, a former president of the association, following the conference with the Bureau, said that he was informed by Commissioner Benjamin P. Moulton that the Bureau was unable to make any ruling delegating the peddlers to any street and advised them to confer again with Mayor James E. Dunne.

**January 9, 1938: Bad (re) location on Spruce Street**



"Yesterday was the First Saturday for the Federal Hill Pushcart Vendors in their new location on Spruce Street." Customers are scarce. The new location dropped business to almost nothing.

**January 10, 1938: Fighting City Hall**



**Mayor James E. Dunne quit his office and went to lunch this noon, refusing to see more than one of a group of Federal Hill pushcart peddlers who wanted to call on him. They wanted to discuss their enforced removal from Balbo avenue. Incensed, the peddlers sat down for more than an hour. Then they, too, quit and went to lunch. They said they'd be back.**

Push carts business leaders assembled at City Hall to show their disdain on the new proposed amendment

# PEDDLERS STAGE SIT-DOWN STRIKE IN DUNNE'S OFFICE

Pushcart Men Insist Mayor  
Meet Delegation Instead  
of One Individual.

EXECUTIVE WALKS OUT

Federal Hill Group Waits Hour,  
Then Departs, Returning  
Later in Day.

Three delegates of the Federal Hill  
pushcart peddlers' organization re-  
sumed their "sitting down" in  
Mayor Dunne's office at 3:30 p. m.  
in a second attempt to force the  
mayor to listen to their protest at  
the Balbo avenue ouster order.

Sixteen Federal Hill peddlers who  
called at Mayor Dunne's office to-  
day to protest their ouster from  
Balbo avenue push cart locations  
staged a sit-down strike at City Hall  
for nearly an hour today when the  
mayor refused to see more than one  
of them.

The Mayor, ignoring the sugges-  
tion he see a delegation of three, put  
on his hat and went to lunch short-  
ly after noontime. The peddlers re-  
mained, pretty well filling the avail-  
able benches, and said they would  
stay until Mayor Dunne saw a dele-  
gation.

As the lunch hour wore on, how-  
ever, they tired of waiting, and left,  
leaving word with the mayor's office  
staff a delegation of three would re-  
turn at 3 o'clock.

When the group first arrived, the  
mayor sent out word he would see a  
spokesman for a few minutes.

### Mayor's Offer Refused

This offer was refused by the dele-  
gation of 16 and they sent word back  
to the Mayor that they wanted a com-  
mittee—and not one man—to inter-  
view him. The Mayor renewed his  
offer and when they again refused  
it, saying "a committee or nothing,"  
Mayor Dunne left his office.

The delegation immediately took  
all the available seats in the outer  
office of the executive department.  
Anthony G. Muratore, former presi-  
dent of the association, said they  
would sit there until Mayor Dunne  
agreed to see at least a committee of  
three members.

"This is too important a job for one  
man and none of us wants to accept  
the job or the responsibility," Mura-  
tore said. "Mayor Dunne ought to be  
fair enough to see a committee of at  
least three men, in order to be fair  
to the association. Three men will  
understand him better than one  
man," Muratore said.

Previous to their visit to Mayor  
Dunne's office the pushcart men had  
interviewed Public Works Commis-  
sioner Charles A. Maguire on the  
possibility of returning to the Balbo  
avenue locations which were denied  
them after Jan. 1 by order of the Bu-  
reau of Police and Fire. The bureau

Continued on Page 4, Col. 4.

Peddlers

## PEDDLERS

Continued from Page One.

acted at the request of Alderman  
Thomas S. Luongo.

### Claim "Buck" Passed

Lawrence J. Pagella, who de-  
scribed himself as a former news-  
paper man and a member of the ad-  
visory committee of the pushcart as-  
sociation, said: "Mr. Maguire passed  
the buck. He talked about laws en-  
acted a long time ago and some more  
that will be passed to protect us.  
That's why we want to see the  
mayor."

Muratore said he had two petitions  
to present to Mayor Dunne. One was  
signed by residents and taxpayers of  
Acorn street and Balbo avenue who  
not only do not object to having the  
pushcarts there, but request that the  
peddlers be allowed to use those  
streets.

The other petition was signed by  
14 tenants and property owners on  
Spruce street, who do not want the  
pushcarts on that street.

School Committeeman Luigi Ca-  
passo of 150 Acorn street, and Sec-  
retary of State Louis W. Cappelli, ac-  
ting for his father, Antonio F. Cap-  
pelli, owner of property from 66 to  
74 Balbo avenue, were among those  
signing the former petition.

The manager of a Woolworth store  
at Balbo avenue and Atwells avenue,  
Bennie Caricuolo, also was among  
those siding with the pushcart men.  
Others whose signatures appear on  
the petition requesting that pushcart  
men be allowed to use Balbo avenue  
are: Emilio Perrotti, 156 Acorn  
street; Vincent G. Pantalone, 156  
Acorn street; Samuel Mazick, 62 and  
64 Balbo avenue; Domenico Ciolfi,  
140½ Acorn street; Domenico Paglia,  
140 Acorn street; Anthony Pennelli,  
56-60 Balbo avenue; Pasquale Togli-  
ciela, 64 Balbo avenue, and Pasquale  
Rendine, 140-140½ Acorn street.

**January 11, 1938: The photo that broke the impasse**



**Federal Hill's embattled pushcart peddlers brought their wives, their sisters and their cousins and their aunts to City Hall today, ready to stage sit-downs en famille in case Mayor Dunne refused to see their deputation. Here is a group on the steps outside the executive offices, ready to invade the Mayor's office and sit down.**

Public opinion was already with the peddlers, and the sight of women and children sitting in reproach, ignored, was a public-relations nightmare for the city.

# SIT-DOWN AT CITY HALL CONCLUDED

## Mayor Dunne Agrees to See Three Representatives of Pushcart Peddlers.

The sit-down demonstration of peddlers in the Mayor's office at City Hall was broken at noon today.

Shortly after 11:30 o'clock, Mayor James E. Dunne agreed to see a committee of three members representing the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Protective Association, when the group agreed to drop Lawrence J. Pagella, who, although a member of the association, is not a peddler.

The mayor's decision to see the peddlers put to an end a two-hour sit-down this morning by more than 35 peddlers, their wives and children, who were determined to stay in the executive offices until the mayor saw the committee.

The group sought to continue their protests over being ousted from Balbo avenue and Acorn street on Jan. 1 by the Bureau of Police and Fire. Their removal from the places they have occupied for almost 40 years was ordered by the bureau at the request of Alderman Thomas S. Luongo.

### Business Men Protest

Before he had seen the peddlers' committee, Mayor Dunne was visited by a committee representing the Federal Hill Business Men's Association.

Continued on Page 14, Col. 3.  
Pushcarts

## PEDDLERS

Continued from Page One.

acted at the request of Alderman Thomas S. Luongo.

### Claim "Buck" Passed

Lawrence J. Pagella, who described himself as a former newspaper man and a member of the advisory committee of the pushcart association, said: "Mr. Maguire passed the buck. He talked about laws enacted a long time ago and some more that will be passed to protect us. That's why we want to see the mayor."

Muratore said he had two petitions to present to Mayor Dunne. One was signed by residents and taxpayers of Acorn street and Balbo avenue who not only do not object to having the pushcarts there, but request that the peddlers be allowed to use those streets.

The other petition was signed by 14 tenants and property owners on Spruce street, who do not want the pushcarts on that street.

School Committeeman Luigi Capasso of 150 Acorn street, and Secretary of State Louis W. Cappelli, acting for his father, Antonio F. Cappelli, owner of property from 68 to 74 Balbo avenue, were among those signing the former petition.

The manager of a Woolworth store at Balbo avenue and Atwells avenue, Bennie Caricuolo, also was among those siding with the pushcart men. Others whose signatures appear on the petition requesting that pushcart men be allowed to use Balbo avenue are: Emilio Perrotti, 156 Acorn street; Vincent G. Pantalone, 156 Acorn street; Samuel Mazick, 62 and 64 Balbo avenue; Domenico Ciolfi, 140½ Acorn street; Domenico Paglia, 140 Acorn street; Anthony Pennelli, 56-60 Balbo avenue; Pasquale Toglietta, 64 Balbo avenue, and Pasquale Rendine, 140-140½ Acorn street.

## CELLA HOPES FOR PEDDLER SOLUTION

Refers to Petition of 1926.  
Dunne Says "Situation Un-  
changed" After Conference.

In an attempt to reach an amicable solution to the Federal Hill pushcart peddler problem Dr. Louis J. Cella, former Alderman of the old Ninth Ward, which later became the 13th Ward, and Albert A. Soriero, counsel for the Federal Hill Pushcart Peddlers' Association, conferred yesterday with Mayor James E. Dunne.

While he declined to disclose details of the conference, Dr. Cella said the problem was discussed exhaustively and that he hoped a solution might be found within the next week.

The former Alderman is thoroughly acquainted with the pushcart peddler problem for he tried in 1926 to interest the city in setting up a market place for the peddlers under an

arrangement by which they would rent their stalls from the city.

"In 1926," Dr. Cella said, "the pushcart peddlers were all over Federal Hill. There was no one place for them. They came to me and said they wanted to go on Acorn street. I got a petition from all the real estate owners on the street agreeing to the proposal. I took the petition to the Board of Aldermen that the peddlers be placed on Acorn street and an ordinance was passed.

"In a month or two there was a fire on Acorn street. The firemen claimed they couldn't get through the street. So the police and fire departments put the peddlers back on Balbo avenue. The peddlers wanted to know how they would select their stalls, so I suggested that they all line up and race for their places."

"The present law under which the peddlers are being controlled, I believe, is antiquated."

Dr. Cella said he went out of the Board of Aldermen in 1926 and nothing further was done about the market place suggestion.

Anthony G. Muratore and Leo Garafalo of the Peddlers' Association remained outside the Mayor's office during yesterday's conference.

Another appeal on behalf of the

ousted peddlers was mailed to Mayor Dunne last night by the Gesler Street Political Club, Inc., an organization of 150 members. The letter, indorsed by the entire membership, protested against "the tactics employed in forbidding Mr. Lawrence Pagella, one of their members, from serving on the committee chosen to interview Your Honor."

"The motive which prompted Mr. Pagella to approach Your Honor sprang from a conscious sense of justice" the letter continued. "Sixty families, suddenly deprived of their only means of obtaining a livelihood, demanded that a wrong be righted.

"Sixty families, chained by a law of iniquity to a level of economic subservience, cried aloud for deliverance. Sixty families voiced an appeal for tolerance and humanness.

"As a rank and file Democrat who campaigned vigorously while disinterestedly for Your Honor's election, he believed that his moral integrity would be so highly regarded by Your Honor that his appeal in behalf of the push cart peddlers might induce the Executive to apply leniency in the enforcement of the law. The treatment accorded him was out of all proportion to that expected."

January 18, 1938: Victory as Alderman gives up

## Pushcart Peddlers Will Return to Old Stands

### Both Branches of City Council Pass Resolution Ending Ban and Providing for Occupancy of Spaces Formerly Used.

Federal Hill's pushcart peddlers, removed from Balbo avenue Jan. 1 after long agitation initiated by Alderman Thomas S. Luongo, 13th Ward Democrat, will be back at the old stand in no time.

Both branches of the City Council this afternoon passed Alderman Luongo's resolution ending the ban and providing that the peddlers go back not only to Balbo avenue and Acorn street, but to the spaces they've had in the past.

#### Luongo First

Luongo and Alderman Herbert E. Humes, Ninth Ward Republican, had identical resolutions in their pockets, but Luongo got his in first.

The Thirteenth Ward Alderman, whose last few months have been one pushcart battle after another, said the return of the peddlers to

### PEDDLERS

Continued from Page One.

them go back until a permanent arrangement can be made."

A delegation of representatives of the pushcart peddlers was at City Hall.

When the resolution was read, Alderman Luongo, moved for immediate consideration, adding briefly that he approved of it after hearing the advice given him by merchants on Federal Hill.

Alderman Frank Rao seconded the motion, saying that "I am glad we

their old stands will be only temporary.

"We are working on a plan now and hope we will be able to give the peddlers a permanent market building or place," Luongo said after the Aldermanic session. "Councilman Viola (likewise a Thirteenth Ward Democrat) is chairman of the slum clearance committee, and we're working with him."

Asked what had impelled him to reverse his stand, Luongo said:

#### Discussed Whole Thing

"It came after a meeting of business men. No—not Federal Hill business men, business men in general. We discussed the whole thing and decided it would be better to let

Continued on Page 11, Col. 1.

#### Peddlers

can see the folly of referring the original resolution banning the pushcart men from Balbo avenue to the police commission."

Alderman John E. Duggan asked "why the about face." Alderman Luongo jumped to his feet and told Duggan not to worry about other wards than his own.

Alderman James H. Lynch, Jr., said he was glad that Luongo had yielded to the advice of Federal Hill merchants, and "that he was clever enough to change his stand."

When the resolution was read in the Common Council, Councilman William Coleman, Republican floor leader, asked if the pushcarts would be in the same status as they were before the ouster order. Receiving an affirmative reply he said, "I'm in favor of it; I sympathize with the peddlers." The resolution passed without a dissenting vote.

## **February 9, 1938: Pushed by the Senate**

"A few hours after the Bureau of Police and Fire had granted the first two applications of pushcart peddlers for licenses to do business again on Balbo Avenue and Acorn Street, the Senate this afternoon passed an act directing the bureau to take such steps for the ousted peddlers".

Peddlers in the Senate chamber applauded as the Senate received the measure from its special legislation committee and, under a bi-party agreement, whipped it through."

The rent was \$25 a year, pro-rated if they peddlers wished to skip the dead-of-winter months, and applications required the approval of the owners of the buildings in front of which they wished to squat.

The peddlers had won. Balbo Avenue was again Pushcart Row.

In June, 1958, still on the City Council, Luongo introduced a resolution to rename Balbo Avenue to De Pasquale Avenue to honor late Sixth District Court Judge Luigi De Pasquale.