

# THE EMIGRATION OF FRIULIANS TO GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

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## 16th century - 1800 – From the “*cramars*” to modern emigration

Between the 19th and 20th centuries Austria and Germany were the destinations par excellence for emigrants from Friuli. However this kind of emigration was very different in form, size and character from the emigration of the modern age. The first examples of “traditional” emigration date back to the 16th and 17th centuries when hunger, epidemics and the feudal system drove the people from Carnia to head towards the Hapsburg Empire in Istria and Bavaria. This was a temporary migration of peddlers (the “*cramars*”) and weavers which occurred during the winter months in the mountain regions to supplement their living from agricultural activities. This type of migration remained substantially unchanged until the end of the 18th century when the decline in the domestic textile industry, the restrictions on commercial activities and the development of building yards on the other side of the Alps together with the increase in population led to a notable change in migration across the Alps.

### 1. *Interruptions and changes in migratory movements*

Around the middle of the 19th century the industrial processes greatly revolutionized the balance of population in the mountain areas when development in European cities, road systems and railways started to attract the male working population during the good season. Between 1850 and 1860 there was a real economic change and a change in the kind of work from peddling and textile crafts to the building trade.<sup>1</sup> This important “break”, however, did not happen unequivocally, different

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<sup>1</sup> A. Fornasin, *Emigrazioni e mestieri in Carnia: la cesura del XIX secolo*, in «In Alto», s. IV, vol. LXXX, 1998, pages. 19-40; G. Ferigo-A. Fornasin (edited by), *Cramars. Emigrazione, mobilità, mestieri ambulanti della Carnia in Età Moderna, Arti Grafiche*, Udine 1997. A. Fornasin, *Ambulanti, artigiani e mercanti. L'emigrazione dalla Carnia in età*

cases have highlighted how, in the area of the foothills, during the course of the first half of the 19th century, the Friulians had already started to move towards the building trade in Salzburg, Graz, Innsbruck, Vienna and Bavaria. This was a period of transition when the old crafts (weavers, cheese and salami sellers and peddlers) coexisted with the “new” crafts (builders, carpenters and furnace workers).

With the onset of industrialization, countries like Austria and Germany requested the new workers and speeded up emigration from Friuli. The differences from traditional migration were marked not just by the time of emigration – which happened during the good season, going from spring to autumn – but also the numbers of emigrants. In fact the Friulians were excluded from work in the industrial sector which was kept for the Austrian and German workers, and specialized not only in more manual labour (unskilled labourers, navies, diggers, quarrymen and woodcutters) but also in jobs demanding great expertise (brick layers, stonemasons, sawyers and decorators). Led by expert foremen, not without conflicts, they made their way thanks to their mobility, high productivity, organization and professional competence. Encouraged by the “building frenzy” in Europe, the population increase and the heavy tax demands of the new Italian state, migration extended from the mountain regions to the plain during the last decades of the 19th century. Labourers and small property owners migrated and went as unskilled workers to the furnaces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The seasonal migration system became an important element in the Friulian economy<sup>2</sup>.

## **1860-1914 Mass emigration to the Central Empires**

**The annexation of Friuli to the Kingdom of Italy increased the flow of migration to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The increase in population registered in the province of Udine between 1881 and 1911, the burdens of taxes, the drastic**

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*moderna*, Cierre, Verona 1998; F. Micelli, *Emigrazione friulana (1815-1915). Liberali e geografi, socialisti e cattolici a confronto*, in «Qualestoria», 1982, n.3, pages 5-38

<sup>2</sup> G. Picotti, *Le condizioni dell'industria nella provincia di Udine. Note sull'emigrazione e sulla legislazione del lavoro*, in «Bollettino dell'Ispettorato dell'Industria e del Lavoro», 1914, nos. 7-8, page 188

**fragmentation of land, and the difficulties connected to the agricultural changes and the arrival of industrialization all helped to push people towards the countries north of the Alps. At the same time both Austria and Germany needed manpower from the middle of the 19th century to sustain their programmes of urban expansion and the building of infra-structures. The choice of temporary migration, mainly male, allowed them to maintain their families and at the same time to continue to live in the community they belonged to. Despite international competition the Friulians managed to carve themselves a good sized niche in the building sector. A constant chain of migratory craftsmen, guaranteed a selection of manpower, the migratory system established itself as an important economic driving force. Up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 temporary migration became mass phenomena capable of deeply affecting the society and imagination of the Friulians.**

## *2. Towards the German speaking countries. Mobility, flows, crafts and destinations.*

During the 1880s the number of Friulian emigrants who headed for Austria and Germany increased rapidly. The destinations weren't always the same; the seasonal Friulian workers were in fact extremely sensitive to the different job opportunities the German-Danubian work market offered from year to year. Thus sparking off a real form of “nomadic”, as Giovanni Cosattini pointed out, «when a nation no longer asks for these swarms of workers, they respond to the call from another country which is just beginning works already completed elsewhere. From Austria you move to Germany, from here to Hungary in 1875, and then in 1876 down into Bosnia, Romania, Bulgaria and then Serbia”.<sup>3</sup> The ability to “follow” work was not just a characteristic of the brick layers, stone cutters and unskilled workers but also of the furnace workers who, guided by their mediators, were ready to move as soon as they heard about more profitable opportunities. In an interview recorded in 1979 Angelo Pressacco, from Turida, born in 1886, remembered leaving with his father the first

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<sup>3</sup> G. Cosattini, *L'emigrazione temporanea dal Friuli*, Udine-Trieste 1983 (1903), page 19

time “to prepare sand for moulds” in Klagenfurt and then Bavaria “*a fa madòn*” [...]. Then he went to make bricks in Berlin for two years and then for three years in Duisberg on the Rhine. He was then in Cologne and another city in Germany. He carried on making bricks for 18 years.»<sup>4</sup>

According to the official statistics, which did not take into consideration the illegal migrations, temporary migrations from Friuli increased on a regular basis: in 1876, 25,000-30,000 migrants left, in 1890 the number had risen to about 50,000-60,000, whilst in the years preceding the First World War the statistics from the provincial Employment Exchange of Udine show that more than 89,000 seasonal workers, equivalent to 11% of the entire population of the province, were working abroad. An interesting fact of the migratory phenomena is that there was an increased number of women (at least 9,885), and children employed in the drudgery of the brickyards.<sup>5</sup>

There was also a gradual increase in the emigration towards Austria: if in the 1880s there were annually about 10,000-12,000 migrants, there was a notable increase in the following decade, reaching an average of 15,000, with peaks of 17,000-22,000 (in 1890 and 1896). The turn of the century saw the peak in migration to nearby Austria: during the years 1900-1903 (17,853, 41,220, 15,438, 21,654), then decreasing in 1904 to 9,432. In the following decade there were about 10,000-12,000 annually.

As the migration to Austria decreased, the migration to Germany increased; the flows of migration here were “recent”. During the 1880s only about 3,500-4,000 migrants went to Germany; the change happened in 1889-1890 when there was a wave of expansion in the building trade and industrialization. From this moment on, taking account of fluctuations in moments of crisis, there were about 10,000

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<sup>4</sup> C. Rinaldi (edited by), *Sedegliano. Un popolo, una cultura ieri e oggi*, vol. 1, Comune di Sedegliano, Tip. Istituto salesiano Pio XI, Rome, Sedegliano 1997, pages 55-56

<sup>5</sup> Ufficio Provinciale del Lavoro di Udine, *Memoriale sull'opera svolta dall'Ufficio Provinciale del Lavoro di Udine dal 1 July 1908 al 31 dicembre 1910, e pubblicazioni relative*, Udine, 1911, page 5

migrants, which increased to 13,000 in the first years of the 1890s going up to 19,998 in 1903 and reaching a peak of 14,000-15,000 in the period 1910-1914.<sup>6</sup>

At its height the seasonal migratory movement of Friulians was monopolized by the Central Empires. According to the analysis of Giovanni Cosattini, based on railway statistics, 41% of seasonal workers went to Austria, 41% to Germany, 8% to Hungary, while the rest chose other continents.<sup>7</sup> The builders from the mountain regions headed for North and West Germany (Baden-Württemberg, the Rhineland, Westphalia, Prussia). The furnace workers, on the other hand, headed for the South-West regions (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) and for nearby Austria. A number of building contractors were involved in the public and private building trade in Styria and Karinzia, and also many sawyers and woodcutters went to these regions.

From a professional point of view, at the turn of the century there were 20,000 furnace workers, 18,000 brick layers, 2,000 stone masons, 3,000 terrazzo floor layers, 2,000-3,000 woodcutters and sawyers, about 2,000 building contractors and small piece workers. At its height the migration had moulded itself into a set pattern of areas of departure and the same kind of crafts; as can be shown by the aforementioned enquiry of the Provincial Employment Exchange, 95% of the migrants from the region of Carnia were brick layers and stone masons (the others were mainly woodcutters and sawyers); from the areas around Pordenone 45% of migrants were brick layers (particularly from the mountain areas), 45% furnace workers and to a lesser extent mosaic layers, terrazzo floor layers and miners; from the surrounding areas of Udine 80% of the migrants were furnace workers, 15% brick layers and the other 5% a mixture of stone cutters, labourers and peddlers.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the 19th century temporary migration was primarily focused on the countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Bavaria, in the latter region there was a concentration of furnace workers from the hill region. According to some sources there were 400

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<sup>6</sup> My revision from B. M. Pagani, *L'emigrazione friulana dalla metà del XIX secolo al 1940*, Arti Grafiche Friulane, Udine 1968, pages 233-374

<sup>7</sup> G. . Cosattini, *L'emigrazione temporanea dal Friuli* cit., pages 126-138.

<sup>8</sup> Provincial Employment office, Udine, *Memoriale* cit., pages 4-9

foremen from Buja in the suburbs around Munich with thousands of workers from the plains working for them.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Austria, Germany and the International labour market.

Starting from the middle of the 19th century migrants from Friuli were involved in the building and expansion of capital cities and important cities such as Berlin, Vienna, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, Graz, Salzburg and Munich. They were also involved in the building of tunnels and railways, embankments, aqueducts, canals, sewers, drainage works and land reclamation in Austria, Bavaria and Württemberg. Generally speaking the Friulians first started working on infrastructures and then moved to the private and public building trade.<sup>10</sup> It was in the latter case that Germany became attractive and between 1895 and 1913 experienced an exceptional period of economic growth which, with the lack of local manpower and the high wages which could be made over a short period of time, attracted tens of thousands of Italians, Dutch and Polish workers.<sup>11</sup> With the marked exception of furnace workers the Friulian manpower consisted of skilled labour (brick layers, stone cutters and plasterers), while the labourers from the Po valley mainly worked on the huge infrastructures (canals, mines, ports and tunnels). There were many Friulian furnace workers in Bavaria and Württemberg, while the builders, following the opening of various building yards also spread to Northern regions, in Prussia, Saxony or Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>12</sup> Following a general tendency, in the first decade of the 20th century, the number of Friulians in the western regions of the Rhineland and Westphalia increased, thanks to the sudden industrial development of the Rhur basin. In this period alongside the migration of male workers there was also that of female workers who went to work in the brickyards and the textile factories in Southern

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<sup>9</sup> G. Ellero, *Buja. Terra e popolo*, Comune di Buja, Buja 1984, pages 11-15; F. Micelli, *Emigrazione e fornaciai friulani*, in M. Buora-T. Ribezzi (edited by), *Fornaci e Fornaciai in Friuli*, Comune di Udine, Udine 1987, pages 174-183; P. F. Guerra, *I fornaciai di Martinazzo*, Ente Friuli nel mondo, Udine 1985.

<sup>10</sup> G. Chiap, *L'emigrazione periodica dal Friuli*, in «La Riforma Sociale», XI, 1904, vol. XIV, pages 369-370; 378

<sup>11</sup> K. J. Bade, *L'Europa in movimento. Le migrazioni dal settecento a oggi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2001, p. 68; 94-95; H. Schäfer, *L'immigrazione italiana nell'Impero tedesco (1890-1914)*, in B. Bezza (edited by), *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigrati italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione (1880-1940)*, Fondazione Brodolini, Milan 1983

<sup>12</sup> M. Puppini, *Movimento operaio ed emigrazione in Carnia e Canal del Ferro dai primi del '900 alla Resistenza*, in «Qualestoria», 1982, n.3, pages 83-119.

Germany. According to a research carried out by the Commisariat General of Emigration in Cologne about 3,000 Italian textile workers were working in Germany in 1908, many of them coming from Friuli. To reassure the families and encourage recruitment, German industrialists provided lodging and boarding often managed by strict religious organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Although they were recognized and respected for their technical ability and their reliability, the Friulian migrants were nevertheless considered “second class citizens”, and used to fill the spaces created by the industrialization process, thus remaining at the bottom of the working ladder and could be dismissed easily in case of an economic crisis.<sup>14</sup> As can be seen from the frequent changes in migration, the Friulian work force suffered considerably from the market cycles in the building trade and industry. Periods of crisis led many German workers back into the more arduous and less profitable jobs, therefore reducing the employment of Italian migrants and forcing them to look for other jobs or to return to their home land. An example of such a situation was the decrease in the building market caused by the credit squeeze after the Balkan wars at the beginning of the 20th century. People returning home, loss of work, failure because of lack of capital were not infrequent episodes. However, even in moments of difficulty, the Friulian workers managed to take advantage of the more liberal immigration policy adopted by the Southern regions of Germany, which enabled them to avoid the penalizing measures and the harsh protectionism experienced by the Polish workers in Prussia.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Brick layers and Furnace workers

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<sup>13</sup> G. Pertile, *Gli italiani in Germania*, in «Bollettino dell'Emigrazione», nos. 11-12, 1914, page 816. *Per la protezione della donna italiana all'estero. L'opera in Germania 1909-1910*, «Il Crociato», 20 July 1910; A. Mattanza, *L'immigrazione minorile italiana nell'impero guglielmino (1890-1914)*, in B. Bianchi-A. Lotto (edited by), *Lavoro ed emigrazione minorile dall'Unità alla grande guerra*, Ateneo Veneto, Venezia, 2000, page 77.

<sup>14</sup> L. Trincia, *Emigrazione e diaspora. Chiesa e lavoratori italiani in Svizzera e in Germania fino alla prima guerra mondiale*, Studium, Rome 1996, page 81

<sup>15</sup> R. Del Fabbro, *L'immigration italienne dans le Reich impérial allemand (1870-1914)*, in A. Bechelloni-M. Dreyfus-P. Milza (edited by), *L'integration italienne en France*, Campin, Bruxelles 1995, page 374

The brick layers and furnace workers, who formed the two main groups of seasonal migration workers, represented by their very composition, organization and professional skills, two opposite poles which were reflected in the different way they fitted into the emigration process during the second half of the 19th century. While the brick layers, stone masons and stone cutters who mainly came from the mountain regions had already been part of the migratory process for a longer time, gaining important experience, the migrants from the hill regions and from the plains formed a second wave of migrants onto the international market. They had no experience nor skills and thus they had to take the more menial and tiring jobs, such as carrying, unskilled labour in the brickyards and diggings.

Migration, however was not standard. As it can be seen from the most recent studies, it had a sort of internal stratification: the organization and professional culture of the stone workers allowed them, after a long, hard phase of piece work and contracts in the big public works, to accumulate capital and thus to use it to set themselves up in the building trade in Germany and Austria. One such building contractor, Giacomo Ceconi from Montecón, stands out. He carried out huge works such as the tunneling for the Trans-Alpine railway; or the Baviera-Pezzutti, a company from Vigonovo near Pordenone, who carried out the work of embankment of the River Danube in Lower Austria. Between the 19th and 20th centuries a small group of building contractors and their able workers in the building trade, at the time working in Karinzia, in the area around Salzburg and in Bavaria, reinvested their capital in the building trade or dedicated themselves to the recruitment of small teams of workers as subcontractors for Italian and German building contractors. This building contract network worked not only for the recruitment but also for the destinations and the professions of those who left.<sup>16</sup> The history of many urban centres and Austrian and German holiday resorts is indelibly linked to the individual Friulian building contractors; the development of the centre of Graz, Salzburg, Bad Gastein and Zell am See took place thanks to the work of building contractors such as

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<sup>16</sup> A. D'Agostin-J. Grossutti, *Ti ho spedito lire cento. Le stagioni di Luigi Piccoli, emigrante friulano. Lettere famigliari (1905-1915)*, Biblioteca dell'Immagine, Pordenone, 1997.



Andrea Franz from Moggio, Valentino Ceconi and Giacomo Menis from Artegna.<sup>17</sup> A large group of brick layers, stone masons and stone cutters were employed by these building contractors and they formed a sort of well organized and capable working hierarchy, with a well defined professional identity.

The building contractors for Carnia, divided into teams from the same town or valley, mainly headed to Germany where there were better working conditions and pay because of a more advanced social system. On the other hand workers from the foothills preferred to go to Austria where, despite the lower cost of the journey, the working conditions were worse, with longer working days (an average of ten hours a day), the food was poor, the living quarters were run down and often just shacks set up near the building yards; sometimes they had to sleep in barns or lean-tos. Season after season, the movements between Austria and Germany were constant, often dictated by the different opportunities to earn, the exchange rate or the possibility of piece work.<sup>18</sup>

The other major component of Friulian emigration was the furnace workers. In contrast to the building trade, they were more open to exploitation, late pay, and many women and children were employed.<sup>19</sup> Coming after the building contractors from the hill regions into the international market the furnace workers went to work in the brickyards in Austria and Germany, trouncing the German, Bohemian and Tyrolean workers with ruthless competition; as Ludovico Zanini clearly explained:

The Friulians came along, who were said to work hours and never see the light of day, existing on polenta and cheese, they introduced the use of the box mould and open working, not afraid of getting sunburnt; they dried the fresh material taking advantage of the open

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<sup>17</sup> M. Ermacora, *Imprenditoria migrante. Costruttori e imprese edili friulane all'estero (1860-1915)*, in *Baumeister dal Friuli. Costruttori e impresari edili migranti nell'Ottocento e primo Novecento*, Associazione culturale Grop Pignot, Udine 2005, pages 115-128.

<sup>18</sup> G. Cosattini, *L'emigrazione temporanea* cit., pages 54-55; C. Noliani-C. Quaglia, *Memorie di un vecchio emigrante*, in «Sot la Nape», 1975, n. 3, page 29

<sup>19</sup> See F. Micelli, *Emigrazione e fornaciai friulani* cit., pages 179-181

spaces. To get on quicker they made soft clay. Prices went down considerably, [...]. With this frantic work, the Friulians were soon everywhere.<sup>20</sup>

Up to the beginning of the First World War about 35,000-40,000 furnace workers went every year to Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg (75%), to Austria (15%) and to Croatia. The majority went to Upper Bavaria, near Munich, where there was plenty of clay and water and it was possible to sell a great number of bricks for the developing city. According to Pietro Sandicchi, the Italian Consul in Munich, there were 15,000 Friulian furnace workers in Bavaria alone in 1912.<sup>21</sup> The building contractors of the hill regions (the foremen-mediators from Buja, Majano, San Daniele, Tarcento and Treppo grande) negotiated the production of brickworks with the owners of the German furnaces and they concerned themselves with recruitment of workers from the Friulian plains during the winter months; workers were taken on with a verbal agreement and the payment of a deposit; the contractor paid the travelling expenses and lodgings which were then deducted from the pay at the end of the season. This system put the worker in the power of the person who made the agreement and frequently caused abuse and bad treatment. Furthermore the agreement made between the contractor and the owner of the German furnace often imposed a high rate of production which meant long working hours (*di un scûr a chel altri*) from dawn to dusk and often the employment of women and children. In order to lower costs, at the beginning of the 20th century, about 5,000 Friulian boys were employed in the furnaces; women and girls were employed in the steam furnaces (*Dampfziegeleien*) where they were used for carrying and perfecting the products.<sup>22</sup> In the furnaces without machines the rhythm of work was intense; the moulders managed to produce 5,000-6,000 bricks a day with boys who had to keep up the pace of adults. The

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<sup>20</sup> L. Zanini, *Friuli migrante*, Doretto, Udine 1964, pages 215-217

<sup>21</sup> P. Sandicchi, *I fornai italiani in Baviera*, in «Bollettino dell'Emigrazione», 1912, n. 12, pages 6; 30. See also *La Baviera e l'emigrazione italiana, rapporto del cav. G. Pezzoni, v. console a Monaco*, in «Emigrazione e colonie» Mae, Rome 1905, vol. 1, part III, pages 59-61

<sup>22</sup> Ufficio Provinciale del Lavoro di Udine, *Memoriale sull'opera svolta dall'ufficio Provinciale del Lavoro* cit. pages 4-9.

increase in production was significant: in 1860 the average daily production of a German worker was about 1,400 bricks a day.<sup>23</sup>

Only in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more attention was paid to working conditions in the brickyards and to the large number of children employed. The fight for improvement in working hours in both Austria and Germany was particularly slow, especially in the brickyards out in the countryside which received fewer visits from German work inspectors. In Bavaria in 1904 the working hours in a brickyard varied from 16 to 18 hours a day, while in 1912 it was reduced to an average of 11-12 hours a day.<sup>24</sup> The situation was aggravated by the poor diet – cheese and polenta – and by the precarious conditions in their lodgings. It is hardly surprising therefore that among the furnace workers there was considerable abuse of alcohol to help them face the long working hours, and many cases of physical decline. Despite the decisive opposition of the German owners, between 1903 and 1904 the government of Upper Bavaria managed to impose the building of special dormitories and regulate the work in the brickyards, controlling the employment of women and children, fixing working hours and age limits, making insurance and a work permit compulsory.<sup>25</sup> However, because of the pressure of the owners of the brickyards and the contractors, there were many irregularities up to the outbreak of the First World War. Despite stricter controls both in Friuli and in the brickyards abroad the employment of children did not go down notwithstanding the approval in 1913 of special contracts limiting, even partially, the exploitation of young workers.<sup>26</sup>

##### *5. Protection and unionization. Light and shade.*

The many contradictions in the migratory movement: the practice of blacklegging, the cheating, the verbal contracts, the many episodes of exploitation all helped the founding of the Catholic and Socialist movement “The Secretariat of the People” and

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<sup>23</sup> F. Lutz, *I fornaciai friulani in Baviera nella zona est di Monaco*, Chiandetti, Reana, 1994, page 58

<sup>24</sup> P. Sandicchi, *I fornaciai italiani in Baviera* cit., page 10.

<sup>25</sup> F. Lutz, *I fornaciai friulani in Baviera* cit., pages 58-60; 68-73

<sup>26</sup> M. Ermacora, *La scuola del lavoro. Lavoro minorile ed emigrazioni in Friuli (1900-1914)*, Ermi, Udine 1999, pages 124-144.

the “Secretariat of Emigration” founded especially to protect and organize the migrants. It brought the plight of the migrants to public attention, particularly the difficult conditions imposed by the brickyard owners, and above all it fostered a strong network of professional schools and emigration sectors. Contact with the German situation was fruitful; in fact as the historiography has shown, the organizational model of the socialist sections which were founded in Friuli in the first decade of the 20th century was based on the German “Arbeiter Secretariat”, based on self protection and assistance of the migrant worker. The action of the Socialists (and to a lesser extent the Catholics) was directed to different areas of intervention: the fight against blacklegging and alcoholism, professional instruction, the setting up of consumer and work cooperatives and the opening of employment assistance offices abroad. Furthermore the two secretariats, as can be inferred from the relations published annually, were also very active on the legal questions of employment; they corresponded with the migrants and took care of problems connected to insurance and welfare.<sup>27</sup> The periodical convocation of congresses, which allowed the highlighting of wrongs connected to the migration phenomenon, also led to a certain pressure on government organizations, drawing attention to the problems of temporary migration. In 1913 the law concerning migration abroad changed; the repression of illegal child migration and the battle for written contracts were some of the successes tirelessly fought for.

The organization of the workers was a slow and difficult process, first of all because of the strong opposition of the contractors and team leaders who saw the requests for improvement in working conditions as a limitation to the possibilities of getting into the job market. On the other hand a lot of energy was spent on the education of the migrants, on the abolition of verbal contracts, on the reduction in working hours and other forms of exploitation. If action in Friuli led to some

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<sup>27</sup> M. Puppini, *L'emigrazione friulana dalla metà dell'Ottocento alla prima guerra mondiale*, in A. Buvoli (edited by), *Friuli. Storia e società. 1866-1914. Il processo di integrazione nello Stato unitario*, Ifsmi, Pasian di Prato, 2004, pages 143-144; M. Puppini, *Movimento operaio ed emigrazione* cit., page 86. With regard to the Catholics' action compare E. Ellero, *L'azione sociale e pedagogica di don Eugenio Blanchini 1863-1921*, Arti Grafiche, Udine, pages 89-98.

moderate results the same cannot be said for Germany and Austria where the relations between the foreign work force and the unions were “uncertain”. Unionization was limited because the Friulian and foreign workers were often isolated: they were there on a temporary basis and the problems of language were considerable. Furthermore the tendency to save impeded the workers from enrolling in the unions.<sup>28</sup> Contact with the local work force was limited, also because the German workers considered the migrants as lower grade workers. For many reasons therefore there was no working solidarity; there was instead, solidarity among those from the same place of origin who spoke the same language and the tendency to separation was increased by the way of work, the disorganization and the ignorance of the downgraded Friulian workers. The introduction of fewer working hours and a rest on Sundays was accepted reluctantly: the Friulians accepted the regulations when they were working alongside the Germans, but not when they were working for Friulian or Italian contractors or piece workers<sup>29</sup>.

## 6. *The fight against blacklegging*

For a long time in the German speaking countries the word “furlàn” was not only synonymous with a migrant worker but also “a blacklegger” brought in to break up the solidarity of a strike and work for less pay<sup>30</sup>. As Giovanni Cosattini, who worked for the Emigration Secretariat in Udine reported, Friulians abroad were considered the “Chinese of Europe” and were used by both the Italian and German building contractors as “wage reducers”.<sup>31</sup> This practice recalled the aggression with which Friulian building contractors and workers had entered into the job market of the Central Empires starting off a ruthless competition often in violation of the social

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<sup>28</sup> M. Forberg, *Manodopera italiana e sindacati tedeschi nell'impero (1890-1916). Note su un rapporto precario*, in J. Petersen (edited by), *L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania*, Lacaita, Manduria Bari-Rome, 1993, pages 45; 58-59

<sup>29</sup> H. Schäfer, *L'immigrazione italiana nell'Impero tedesco* cit, pages 756-757

<sup>30</sup> R. Del Fabbro, *Emigranti proletari italiani in Germania all'inizio del XX secolo*, in J. Petersen (edited by), *L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania*, Lacaita, Manduria Bari-Rome, 1993 page 39

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. G. Cosattini, *L'azione dello Stato nei riguardi dell'emigrazione temporanea*, supplement n. 2 of the journal of the VI Italian Geographical Congress, May 1907, pages 5-7

laws: the contractors used the Friulian workers as a vast reserve work force to call on in moments of crisis when they wanted to keep costs down.

The friction between the Friulian work force and the German workers' movement increased during the last decade of the 19th century and became particularly acute at the turn of the century, when, as the phase of rebuilding the big cities in Austria and Germany was over, there was less demand for a foreign work force. In this context the German owners used the Friulian work force not only to keep costs down but also to put a brake on the the building trade unions which were fighting to improve working conditions. Individuals who wanted wage integration and were insensitive to any call for "class unity", team leaders and the Friulian brick workers, signed on by the German owners, blacklegged in Austria and Germany and filled in the void left by the strikes, becoming a weapon to wear down the resistance of the workers' unions.<sup>32</sup> The increasing number of blackleg episodes – the most famous being at Kiel, Königsberg, Wiesbaden, Spandau, Danzica and Halle in the first years of the 20th century – increased an already strong dislike of the Friulian workers, to such an extent that they were the object of many cases of violence and beatings by their fellow German workers, who, because of "solidarity and sympathy", also included in their hatred the rest of the Friulian population. The building contractors were obliged to provide armed guards and include special clauses in the contracts which provided for "compensation" if any damage was caused by violence from the local work force.<sup>33</sup>

The growing tensions, which had become a real problem, provided the occasion to experiment an untried action between the growing Friulian Socialist organizations and the German unions, in an attempt to integrate the Friulian workers in the workers' movement in the country. This action manifested itself at different levels: the distribution of the newspaper *L'Operaio Italiano*, which had been

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<sup>32</sup> R. Meneghetti, *Cooperative di lavoro costituite tra lavoratori friulani all'estero*, in «Storia contemporanea in Friuli», XI, 1981, p. 308; E. Ellero, *Il crumiraggio friulano all'estero fra '800 e '900*, in «Storia contemporanea in Friuli», XIII, 1982, pages 137-155; M. Puppini, *In forte catena di solidarietà. Commercio e lavoro dalla Carnia in Austria e Germania nelle corrispondenze (1799-1810/1898-1913)*, in «Almanacco culturale della Carnia», 1991, pages 49-92

<sup>33</sup> G. Chiap, *L'emigrazione periodica dal Friuli* cit., p. 377-378.

published since 1898 by the German builders' Union to the migrant workers together with intense action on the part of the Union and of propaganda in Friuli during the winter months by activists of the Humanitarian Society of Milan and the Friulian Socialist Party.<sup>34</sup> The reports published in the Socialist press concerning the "propaganda itineraries" clearly showed the difficulties the activists had to face on their long winter tours, non-stop work, meetings, lectures and rallies. The reports also noted that women attended the lectures too, and the workers, even though diffident, listened to the problems risen. This campaign of awareness was more difficult in the plain and middle Friuli, while in the mountain region they were able to take advantage of the Socialist support. At the same time, at home and abroad, to point out the destructive role of blacklegging, the *Lavoratore Friulano* and *L'Operaio Italiano*, two Italian workers' newspapers of the time, carried out a campaign against the blackleggers, calling them "traitors".<sup>35</sup> The Socialist leaders themselves took action to criticize the local authorities and make them aware of the delicacy of the problem; for example, after the "betrayal" of the solidarity of the workers at Königsberg in 1904, Cosattini reproached the mayor of Gemona with these words:

There are 80,000 workers in Friuli who work honestly, is it necessary for 250 workers to accept work betraying their own foreign co-workers? The Italians already have the contempt of a large part of public opinion in Germany, why do we have to attract the hatred of the workers and the workers' organizations? [...] Now in Kiel and Leipzig not one of our workers can find work after the blackleggers of the last few years.<sup>36</sup>

The activity of the organization, which was often hampered by the building contractors and the *polier* (building assistants) who took advantage of the management of the teams for blackleg action, was successful in the end. The Socialist organizations and the German unions managed to direct the migratory flow, thus avoiding unemployment, clashes and the break-up of the strikes. After the first

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<sup>34</sup> See the essay by G. L. Bettoli, *Gli emigranti italiani nell'organizzazione sindacale tedesca dalle pagine de «L'Operaio italiano»*, in «Storia Contemporanea in Friuli», 2005, n.36, pages 9-85

<sup>35</sup> Among the many examples see. *V'è un diritto di lavoro per i krumiri?*, «il Lavoratore Friulano», 22 July 1905

<sup>36</sup> Archivio Comunale di Gemona, b. 255, Cat.XIII-XIV, Lettera di Cosattini al sindaco di Gemona, 25 July 1904

instances of solidarity between the Friulian workers and the Germans at Dortmund in 1905, the blackleggers' action was reduced, thanks partly to the increase in the Friulian workers' movement and partly because migration was part of a more general positive economic situation. On the eve of the First World War it could be considered substantially over.

### *7. Emigration to German speaking lands as a factor of economic and social change*

The mass movement from Friulian towns to the German speaking countries at its most "mature" phase brought about positive changes from an economic and a social point of view. In 1910 the flow back from the Hapsburg Empire and Germany amounted to about 18 million lire annually.<sup>37</sup> These resources made a considerable contribution to the industrial take-off in this province and at the same time they enabled a large section of the working population to renovate their houses, buy new equipment for the land and to make improvements in the fields of agriculture and livestock. Furthermore more money meant an improvement in diet and life style. More generally temporary migration prevented the abandonment of the mountain region of Friuli and survival in a demographic context which was constantly increasing. Of no less importance were the social changes and the modernization brought about by the migratory movement, just consider the progress made in literacy, the creation of cooperatives, workers' associations, social dairies and land credit. Emigration itself was self limiting from the moment that – faced with the changes in the international labour market – the associations of mutual aid, like the secretariats, included the importance of the professional schools able to train a capable and competent work force; alongside technical drawing and geometry German was also taught.<sup>38</sup>

Migration to the German speaking countries was also important because it brought about a process of secularization and favoured the introduction of socialism

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<sup>37</sup> *Il risparmio dei friulani all'estero nel 1910*, «La Patria del Friuli», 25 May 1910

<sup>38</sup> L. Antonini Canterin, *Come un frutto spontaneo della libertà. Società operaie, scuole di disegno e cooperative nel distretto di Spilimbergo (1866-1917)*, Designgraf, Udine, 2000; G. Ferigo, *Dire per lettera... Alfabetizzazione, mobilità, scritture popolari dalla montagna friulana*, in «Metodi e Ricerche», XXI, 2002, n.2, pages 43-57



in Friuli<sup>39</sup>. From this point of view, the reports of the parish priests between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the First World War noted not only “outburst of rage and immorality” of the migrants during the winter months, but also expressed great concern for the increase in “religious indifference” and the establishment of the Socialist movement in the mountain regions.<sup>40</sup> In 1912 the setting up of the *Casa del Popolo* at Prato Carnico by the socialist emigrants from the valley shows how the workers organization and the German model had had a positive influence on the emigrants, giving them the ideological means, experience in solidarity and concrete cooperation. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1912 the propagandist Giuseppe Podgornik remarked on the maturation of the workers’ movement in Carnia:

I am speaking in the beautiful room of the *Casa del Popolo*. Prato Carnico is palpable proof of what solidarity in a work force can achieve. Without incurring any debts, without begging a penny from anyone, those clever workers have built a *Casa del Popolo* which is certainly the nicest in all of Veneto. If there were a nucleus of workers in every town in Italy like the one here in Prato, then the Socialist Party and the workers’ organizations would no longer need... the collaboration of a class. At this meeting there are more than 250 people<sup>41</sup>.

Seasonal migration not only introduced “new needs” which were a result of the improvement in the standard of living, but it also changed personal behavior with the introduction of the first forms of contraception and the desire to limit the number of children born. Being a long way from home helped towards a relaxation in sexual habits and a notable increase in venereal diseases: according to a health inquiry in 1894 the province of Udine had the highest number of deaths from syphilis.<sup>42</sup> In short, the migratory movement introduced new excitement in Friulian society and it was accompanied by a close net of social, economic and recreational initiatives of

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<sup>39</sup> See G. Renzulli, *Economia e società in Carnia fra 800 e 900, Dibattito politico e origini del socialismo*, Ifsml, Udine 1978

<sup>40</sup> See M. Ermacora, *Parroci ed emigranti nelle visite pastorali della Diocesi di Udine (1898-1914)*, in «Metodi e Ricerche», 1999, n. 1, pages 55-71

<sup>41</sup> L. Rossi, *L’Operaio italiano*, Publi Paolini, Mantova 2007, page 91

<sup>42</sup> G. Cosattini, *L’emigrazione temporanea* cit., page 96

notable importance. Life was so conditioned by the seasonal work of the expatriates, the social roles, the language and the traditions. It was symptomatic of the importance held by the “German speaking” countries – as a geographical area and synonymous of the work itself – that even in Friulian vocabulary there are German words which can be attributed to the time of temporary migration. Take for example the words “*sine*” (*schienen*, wheeltrack), “*azimpon, lasimpon*” (emigrant, emigration, from *eisenbahn*, railway), “*cucchi*” (*Kuche*, kitchen) or technical words coming from the work environment such as “*Palîr*” (*Polier*, building assistant), “*accordant*” (*Ziegleraccordant*), “*slofen*” (*schlafen*, to sleep), “*lodar*” (*lager*, dormitory, shack), “*spolèr*” (*sparher*, a wood burning stove).<sup>43</sup> Emigration also forcefully affected religiousness, as in the case of the Madonna of the furnace workers of Buja<sup>44</sup>, or – among homesickness, lyricism and realism – in the words of the Friulian ballads<sup>45</sup>, proving the great impact of this experience on the culture and collective imagination of a populace.

## 8. *A difficult integration*

The integration of the Friulian emigrants in Austria and Germany was limited, both because of the temporary nature of their emigration and for the social, linguistic and cultural differences. Contrary to what would happen in a deeply changed context in the interwar years in France, Austria and Germany became the countries of adoption only for limited groups of Friulian emigrants. Not integrating into German society was due to the seasonal commuting; brick workers and furnace workers “used” emigration to continue to live in the Friulian community. As the consular agents noted, the migrants continually moved around because they did not want to register their residence at the town halls, they were mistrustful of the authorities and they

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<sup>43</sup> V. Orioles, *Su un filone poco noto di tedeschismi in Friulano*, in *Studi linguistici in onore di G. B. Pellegrini*, Published by Pacini, Pisa, 1983, pages 297-300; G. Marchetti, *Lineamenti di grammatica friulana*, Società filologica friulana, Udine 1977, pages 53-36; R. Pellegrini, *Emigrazione e lingua*, in «Metodi e Ricerche», 1980, n.2, pages 3-22

<sup>44</sup> P. Menis, *L'avventura della Madonna dei Fornaciaci*, Parrocchia di Avilla di Buja, Udine, 1958

<sup>45</sup> For some examples see, G.Fior, *Villotte canti del Friuli*, Firenze 1977, pages 332-335..

knew little of either the language or the local laws<sup>46</sup>. This same seasonal aspect and the way the Friulians worked, moving around in compact groups and often living isolated from the local communities; made any relations with the local people or fellow workers difficult especially in the first phases of emigration. Cases of drunken disturbances and brawls with the Germans were not infrequent particularly in the brickyards where competition from the Friulian workers was strongly felt.<sup>47</sup> The frugality of the Friulians which made them “bad consumers” and the cultural and linguistic differences alienated German and Austrian society towards the new immigrants who however, over time, managed to become appreciated as tireless workers.<sup>48</sup>

The emigrants who did manage to become integrated in German society were merchants and building entrepreneurs. The latter became “Germanised” weaving a close network of social and professional relations which enabled them to work in the building market. In trade as in industry and the building trade being an “Italian subject” was not an obstacle to business, in fact various Friulian companies won contracts for public building.<sup>49</sup> Having reached a good economic standing many owners of mosaic factories or quarries and many dealers settled permanently on the other side of the Alps. The records from the registry office also testify that many furnace workers, factory workers and labourers married German women. As the consul from Munich in Bavaria noted the habit of emigrating in adolescence fostered ties with the local environment and populace.<sup>50</sup> However naturalization was very limited and integration slow and laborious, often pursued with perseverance.<sup>51</sup>

## **1914-1918 The Great War and the end of an era**

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<sup>46</sup> O. Heye, *Gli Italiani nel distretto di Düsseldorf*, in «Bollettino dell'Emigrazione», n. 5, 1905, page 66

<sup>47</sup> P. Manis, *Vie pas Gjarmaniis*, in «Strolic», 1958, XXXIX, page 78

<sup>48</sup> G. Chiap, *L'emigrazione periodica* cit., pages 377-378

<sup>49</sup> See H. Schäfer, *L'immigrazione italiana* cit., page 751 e *L'emigrazione e le colonie italiane in Austria. Rapporto del cav. G. Zannoni, reggente al cancelleria della R. Ambasciata di Vienna*, October 1901, in «Emigrazione e colonie», vol. I, Mae, Rome 1903, pages 98-99.

<sup>50</sup> A. De Foresta, *La Baviera e l'emigrazione italiana*, in «Emigrazione e colonie», vol 1, parte III, p. 53

<sup>51</sup> R. Pellegrini, *Emigrazione lingua* cit., pages 12-13

**The outbreak of the First World War closed the markets for emigration to the Central Empires. In August 1914 about 80,000 migrants were repatriated, most of them from Austria and Germany. The “migratory system” collapsed under the blow of national mobilization and established, during the period of neutrality, serious social tensions. Forced patriotism and the declarations of war imposed internment and the expulsion of those Italians still present on Austrian soil. At the same time, the wives of German origin of the Friulian emigrants had to undergo urgent checks by the Italian military authorities and they were often interned in Italy. The Friulian population once again came into contact with the Austro-Germans from 1917-1918 during the dramatic year of occupation.**

#### *9. An interruption in the Friulian migratory story 1914-1915*

The onset of the Great War caused a substantial halt in the migratory flows to the Central Empires. The turbulent repatriation of the emigrants occurred between August and September 1914, on a wave of panic and uncertainty about the events. The mobilization of the armies and the change from an economy of peace to one of war in Germany and Austria had created a critical phase in the commercial sector, the luxury industry and above all in the building trade.<sup>52</sup> The declaration of neutrality on the part of the Italian government reflected negatively on the workers who had remained abroad because they were forced to abandon their jobs amidst the insults and threats of the German and Austrian population.<sup>53</sup> The atmosphere of heated nationalism was also measured by the fact that even those emigrants who had been settled abroad for decades had to come back. The swiftness of the repatriations, which happened half way through the “season”, the widespread unemployment and the monetary crisis, caused serious internal tensions. Between September 1914 and April 1915 there were over a hundred disturbances and unrest under the motto “bread

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<sup>52</sup> Ministero Agricoltura Industria e Commercio, Ufficio del Lavoro, *Dati statistici sui rimpatriati per causa di guerra e sulla disoccupazione*, Rome 1915, pages VII-VIII

<sup>53</sup> *L'attività dell'opera Bonomelli in Germania e nell'Austria-Ungheria durante la guerra europea*, in «Rivista di Emigrazione», a. IX, January - February 1916, pages1-7

and work” which were often put down by the police or the army. The block on emigration was thus a real “shock” for a large part of the Friulian population, a “war” which anticipated the fight which would happen a few months later.

The crisis highlighted the mobilization capability and the organization of the Friulian migrants; as well as protesting, which culminated in an anti-military demonstration at Villa Santina on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1915, the workers’ movement was able to propose concrete solutions to alleviate the uneasiness of those without work. The Socialist sections and the mutual aid society pressed the local councils to undertake useful public works (roads, bridges, schools, enlargement of the cemeteries and aqueducts) and they formed work cooperatives, thus proving that they knew how to effectively achieve, in a difficult situation, the long road to solidarity and unions of the previous ten years<sup>54</sup>. In the spring-summer of 1915, when Italy declared war, tensions came to a climax, aggravated by the return of the “*Reichsitaliener*” from Trieste and the Istrian and Dalmatian coasts: they were the thousands of Friulians and Italians who had been settled in the Hapsburg Empire for a long time but were forced to repatriate because they were considered untrustworthy<sup>55</sup>. Still others faced imprisonment and internment in the big “wooden cities” which were actually prison camps in Styria and Bohemia. As the conflict went on, even the Friulian emigrants in Bavaria had to face increasing difficulties; starting from February 1916 panic spread and many left abandoning houses and jobs. Various reports from the aid agencies underlined how the “unrest” against the Italians increased from day to day and was directed at merchants, ice cream sellers and street traders who were not allowed to be seen in public<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Among the many examples see, Archivio Comunale di Socchieve, b. 124, Cat. XIV, Società Ampezzana di mutuo Soccorso ed istruzione fra operai, Provvedimenti pro disoccupati, 3 September 1914. Concerning the agitations compare. R. Meneghetti, *Le agitazioni degli emigranti friulani nel periodo della neutralità (1914-1915)*, in G. Cervani (edited by), *Il movimento nazionale a Trieste nella prima guerra mondiale*, Del Bianco, Udine 1968, pages 293-327; M. Ermacora, *Un anno difficile. Buja agosto 1914-settembre 1915*, El Tomàt, Buja, 2001.

<sup>55</sup> F. Cecotti (edited by), “*Un esilio che non ha pari*”. 1914-1918. *Profughi, internati ed emigrati di Trieste, dell’isontino e dell’Istria*, Libreria Editrice Goriziana, Gorizia, 2001

<sup>56</sup> *I servizi per l’emigrazione dell’«Umanitaria» nel 1915*, Pesaro, 1917, pages 161-164

The entrance of Italy into the war brought about a decisive halt to the migratory movement abroad and it was replaced by an internal movement of Friulian workers involved in supply work behind the lines or they moved to the big cities such as Milan, Turin and Genoa to work in the developing war industry. The experience the emigrants had accumulated abroad in terms of recruitment and technical expertise was used to build the supply and defence infrastructure behind the front lines with the military engineers<sup>57</sup>. On the other hand the war showed its crueler side: Italian military authorities sent into the centre of Italy, as well as those presumed to be “spies”. all those emigrants who had remained in Austria and Germany for a long time and who, for economic or family reasons, kept up contact with emigrants still abroad. Women of German origin also had to undergo similar treatment and just because they had foreign surnames they were kept away from the front lines<sup>58</sup>. The events of the war in October 1917 once again put the Friulian population in contact with the Austro-Germans. Relations with the invader, even though there was violence, abuse and systematic dispossessions, were influenced by the previous migratory experiences, both concerning the decision to remain in Friuli and by the choice to accept recruitment of workers for Austria and Germany set in motion by the occupiers during 1918. The same former migrants, often working as interpreters or administrators, tried to lessen the harshness of occupation, but when the war ended they were charged with being “collaborators”. The violence of the war and the propaganda about the German atrocities seemed to have definitively broken off relations which had never been easy. From the public point of view, instances of nationalism, combined with the dramatic events of the war, contributed to increasing if not hostility a strong diffidence to the German world, an attitude which Mussolini himself, some years later, at the time of new migrations, had trouble changing.

### **1919-1938 The change in the migratory outflow**

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<sup>57</sup> M. Ermacora, *Il lavoro dei ragazzi friulani dall'età giolittiana alla Grande guerra*, in B.Bianchi-A.Lotto (edited by), *Lavoro ed emigrazione minorile dall'Unità alla Grande guerra*, Ateneo Veneto, Venice 2000, pages 126-127.

<sup>58</sup> M. Ermacora, *Le donne internate in Italia durante la Grande Guerra. Esperienze, scritture, memorie*, in *DEP*.

*Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile*, n.7, July 2007, ([www.unive.it/dep.it](http://www.unive.it/dep.it)).

**After the end of the war the Central Empires, beaten and demoralized, were no longer in a position to offer employment to the Friulian emigrants; economic difficulties considerably reduced the presence of a foreign work force. From 1919 Friulian groups preferred to go to Belgium and France where they found work in the rebuilding process in the areas devastated by the war. Other decided to emigrate across the ocean. During the interwar years the flow of “free” migrants to Austria and Germany reached an historical low level.**

#### *10. After the First World War*

The financial difficulties, the reconversion of the economy, the high rate of unemployment and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire caused the closing of the German work market. In the first years after the war Austria and Germany were no longer the destinations for the migrants who headed off to Belgium and France. If between 1910 and 1914 about 40,000 to 50,000 seasonal workers had headed over the Alps, between 1919 and 1923 the official statistics, which however are not reliable, noted that the flows were considerably reduced and there were but a few hundred units. This tendency did not change during the interwar years, and in fact numbers to Austria and Germany were exceeded by destinations relatively new for the Friulians such as Australia, Canada and the United States. Emigration to the German speaking countries was only maintained by those towns which had had a long habit of emigration before the war<sup>59</sup>.

War also cut off the possibility of work in the German regions of the Rhineland and Westphalia where an Italian presence had been consolidated. In 1913 for example there were 110,500 Italian workers in the coal mines, by 1918 there were only 4,100 left. At Bottrop, a town on the Rhine, groups of brick workers and miners from Polcenigo had settled since the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the war the Friulian community was reduced to a small number. Antonietta Bravin wrote:

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<sup>59</sup> T. Tomat, *L'emigrazione da Fagagna tra le due guerre*, Comune di Fagagna, Fagagna, 2004; J. Grossutti-F. Micelli (edited by), *L'altra Tavagnacco. L'emigrazione friulana in Francia tra le due guerre*, Pesian di Prato, Comune di Tavagnacco, 2003

My grandfather, Giacomo Bravin had been in hospital because of an accident [at Bottrop], he had come back to Italy with his family in 1920 and he had a suitcase full of money. But, because of inflation this money was worth hardly anything and we children used it to play with<sup>60</sup>.

In February 1920, even Germany, during this difficult post war period, decided to limit the immigration of foreign workers and bureaucratic checks to limit their entrance were increased. In the second half of the 1920s – the so called *goldene Fünf* – when the German economy seemed to take off again after the post war shock, there was a timid return of Friulian emigration to Austria and some towns in Bavaria. Given the small chance of finding work in the market, they were called “master brickmakers” (*Zeigelmeister*) and came from the hill region, from Buja, Majano and Treppo Grande<sup>61</sup>. There were only a few “seasons” between 1924 and 1931, from the moment when devaluation, the effects of the world economic crisis and unemployment were particularly felt in the German speaking countries and so the migrant works were the first to be dismissed.

However in the brickyards the work seemed unchanged, as Lorenzo Guerra from Buja noted, in the 1920s they went over the border to “make bricks”:

I left for Austria in 1924, you see? I was 19. But I had already been before, in 1922, to Villach in Austria. However since the Austrian Empire had ended and was worth nothing any more, we had had to stop working and go home. Instead in 1924 we worked the season [...]. For every brick maker there were two children who took the brick away and threw it on the ground [...] They were hard [the workers]: the one who made the mortar, the one who dug the earth from the quarry; because they had to do everything with a shovel, there were no diggers, there was nothing. It was all tiring<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> H. Biskup-M.Walders (edited by), *Solo carbone, gelato e pizza? Gli italiani a Bottrop (Germania) dal 1817, Catalogo della mostra*, Comune di Polcenigo, Polcenigo 2006, page 25.

<sup>61</sup> F. Micelli, *Emigrazione e fornaciai friulani* cit., page 182

<sup>62</sup> M. Pauluzzo Guerra, *Fornaciai di Buja, in Immagine cultura. Dalla immagine della famiglia alla descrizione dell'emigrazione, Giovanni D'Aita fotografo (1877-1967)*, Guarnerio editore, Udine 1994, page 44



Even the building work in the German area was extremely difficult; during the interwar years the Friulian building contractors had to deal with a lack of capital, devaluation and the general stagnation in the building trade. After a transitory period they were overwhelmed by the economic crisis and they were forced to close or give up their businesses<sup>63</sup>. Only small groups of specialized workers (furnace workers, terrazzo layers and mosaic layers from Spilimbergo and salami makers from Gemona and Artegna) managed to get through the big economic crisis of 1929, though not without difficulty, continuing to reach destinations in Germany and Austria. The small presence of the Italians in Austria and Germany in the interwar years caused however notable difficulties in the “Fascist political groups of Italians abroad” which made up the principle areas of immigration, in particular in Munich and Vienna<sup>64</sup>. The situation was particularly precarious in Munich where the Fascist political group had to organize assistance activities (a common kitchen, a children’s garden and after school care) for the Friulians and those from the Veneto, who having resided in the town for many years, found themselves without work and not having taken out citizenship could not use the local welfare system<sup>65</sup>.

### 11. *Manpower for coal. The Friulians in the Third Reich 1938-1943*

In the worst years of the world economic crisis, migration to Germany and Austria represented a new form of migration to the Friulians, “directed and protected” by the Fascist regime and part of the broadest political-military picture between Hitler and Mussolini<sup>66</sup>. This possibility of expatriation came at the end of the 1930s at a particularly difficult moment for the province of Friuli, which was suffering from

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<sup>63</sup> M. Ermacora, *Imprenditoria migrante* cit., page 126; A. Filippuzzi, *L'emigrazione dallo spilimberghese*, in *Spilimberc*, Società filologica Friulana, Udine 1984, page 489

<sup>64</sup> D. Cante, *Il contributo delle regioni nord orientali all'emigrazione italiana in Austria tra le due guerre mondiali attraverso i rapporti delle autorità italiane a Vienna*, in «Qualestoria», 1997, n. 1, pages 15-23.

<sup>65</sup> B. Mantelli, *I Fasci in Austria e Germania*, in E. Franzina-M.Sanfilippo (edited by), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati. La parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2003, page 81.

<sup>66</sup> M. Puppini, *L'emigrazione dal Friuli tra la prima e la seconda guerra mondiale*, in A.M. Vinci (edited by), *Friuli Storia e società. 1925-1943, Il regime fascista*, Ifsml, Udine, 2006, page 196. For an overall picture of these migrations see C. Bermani, *Al Lavoro nella Germania di Hitler. Racconti e memorie dell'emigrazione italiana, 1937-1945*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1998; S. BIASONI, *Il regime fascista in Friuli durante gli anni Trenta: disoccupazione, nuovi flussi migratori e assistenza*, in «Storia contemporanea in Friuli», XXX (2000), n. 31, pages 80-85

serious unemployment which neither the internal redevelopments begun by the regime nor migration to East Africa had managed to reduce. Emigration to the Third Reich was based on an exchange of Italian work force and shipments of prime German materials such as coal and steel. The economy of Germany during this phase of rearmament needed a strong contingent, both of agricultural and building workers and workers in the industrial sector. Between 1938 and 1943 about 485,000 workers left Italy organized by Fascist unions. In 1938 the start of organized migration marked the moment of the most serious economic crisis but also the point where the highest number of Friulians accepted Fascism. The expatriations, organized by parades of workers and by a strong propaganda campaign, were introduced not only as a concrete sign of the new international alliance but also as a demonstration of the strong difference of the new Fascist migrations compared to the migrations of the liberal period. The workers who had now become “militant workers”, dressed in the Fascist uniform, organized and disciplined, given a work contract and a secure job, were supposed to represent the avant-garde of the Fascist regime abroad. At first the contingents of Friulians were destined for the building of Volkswagen factories at Wolfsburg and to the Konzern Göring-werke steelworks in Lower Saxony and in the quarries and brickyards of Bavaria, while the teams of agricultural workers were sent to the big farms in Saxony and Eastern Prussia. As Teresa Rossi from Interneppo, who left as a minor for Upper Saxony in 1938 as “a country worker of *Il Duce*”, noted:

There were 33 of us from the Valley of the Lake, six from Interneppo, one from Bordano and the others from Peonis, Avasinis, Osoppo, Alesso and even one from Gemona. We left wearing the Fascist uniform, it was our Sunday best and we greeted the local people with the “Heil Hitler” salute. That part of Saxony had a hilly surface [...]; there they produced potatoes, barley, wheat, beetroot and other vegetables [...]. We worked alongside German workers, both men and women, and they too stayed in houses built on the spot. The estate was

huge and often in the evening we returned in the cart which had brought us something to eat. We spent all day in the fields<sup>67</sup>.

The possibility of emigrating, the excellent wages and working conditions, widely publicized in the press and even from church pulpits had such a great success that the employment exchanges at the town halls were besieged with requests. Although the regulations concerning emigration to the Third Reich required selection on political-moral grounds, it was mainly the unemployed of the foothills and Western Friuli who went – building workers, small craftsmen and factory workers who had already tried working in East Africa and France, or women who had been dismissed after the reconstruction of the textile industry after the great crisis of 1929-1931. Once the war had started, emigration to Germany was also a way to avoid being called up. From the moment of exodus the new waves of migration showed organizational and logistical faults, in particular the limited possibility of sending back earnings, the long working hours in the country, the isolation and the bad diet. However these were all obstacles which were outweighed by the need to work, so much so that between 1941 and 1942, according to records, the presence of the *Fremdarbeiter* (foreign workers) Friulians, reached almost 25,000.

Since 1938 the Friulian workers had been impressed with German efficiency, Leonardo Marini, who worked on the construction of Volkswagen factories noted:

The camp at Fellersben was enormous [...] everything was ready, the dormitories, the wooden houses, they were efficient and organized. [...] I remember that the Germans were more advanced than we were and they could throw reinforced concrete hundreds of metres through a tube of compressed air; there were hundreds of Friulian workers who were spreading it and

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<sup>67</sup> Statement quoted in A. Verrocchio (edited by), *Bordan e tarnep. Int pal mont*, Arti Grafiche, Udine, 1991, page 58

hitting the framework with wooden hammers so that the cement went down the columns and then they took the framework away<sup>68</sup>.

The experience of working for the Third Reich, although for a long time forgotten and remembered only by individuals, nevertheless had a huge impact on the workers. This is clear from the testimonies of the factory and agricultural workers. Germany showed them a model of relations and work profoundly different from that in Italy, marked by classicism and exploitation. The social organization and the modernity were appreciated even if the limits on freedom imposed by the Fascist regime soon became evident, and never more so than when the workers tried to socialize with the German girls. The beginning of the war marked a decisive worsening in work conditions; the increase in recruitment of Italian workers from 1940 to 1941 disrupted the systems of welcoming and supplies and so the cases of intolerance increased. In the following two years the numbers of those going back to Germany after a break decreased because of the checks by the local authorities and by the continual bombardments of the German cities. From 8<sup>th</sup> September 1943 about 100,000 Italian workers were blocked in Germany, like hostages. Even though they were privileged compared to the Russian and Polish *Ostarbeiter*, the Italian workers were subjected to a forced work regime, right up to the end of the war they were employed to clear up the rubble in the bombed cities and in the most arduous jobs of the war industry.

### **1954-1975 The resumption of emigration**

**During the years of postwar reconstruction, the Friulians did not consider Germany and Austria but preferred France, Belgium and later to Switzerland. Some emigrated to Austria but it was only in the second half of the 1950s that emigration to Germany became appreciable thanks to intergovernmental agreements and the gradual improvement in the German economy which required an ever greater number of foreign workers. Up until the middle of the**

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<sup>68</sup> Statement quoted in M. Ermacora, *Campi e cantieri di Germania. Migranti friulani nel Reich hitleriano (1938-1943)*, in M. Fincardi (edited by), *Emigranti a passo Romano. Operai dell'Alto Veneto e Friuli nella Germania hitleriana*, Istresco-Ifsml, Verona, Cierre, 2002, page 177

**1960s with its long term contracts in the building trade, in mining and in factories and higher salaries Germany, like Switzerland, became one of the main places on the continent to get to during the last phase of the history of Friulian migration.**

## *12. In Austria and Germany in the post war period.*

During the decade after the Second World War the rates of unemployment in Austria and Germany were particularly high and so the employment of foreign workers was limited. From the professional point of view the reduced flows of migrants in the years 1947-1949 and 1951-1952 concerned small groups of brick workers, unskilled workers, woodcutters, furnace workers and farmers<sup>69</sup>. After this period Austria was no longer a destination of significant importance in the work market unless it was for movements of an 'across the border' nature. The migratory picture changed from the second half of the 1950s when the growth in the German economy needed a foreign work force, with seasonal or long term contracts. In 1955 the German and Italian governments drew up an agreement for the recruitment and employment of Italian workers in Germany from the regions of Italy with the highest rates of unemployment<sup>70</sup>.

Starting from 1955-1956, the Italian-German intergovernmental commission based in Verona asked for farmers, building workers, quarry workers, miners and unskilled labourers to go to the Ruhr basin. After this, German entrepreneurs got in contact with local employment offices to recruit and sign on building workers, carpenters, quarry workers, granting offers of work to those coming from the more depressed areas, in particular for the mountain and foothill areas of the River Tagliamento, the valley of the River Natisone and the area around Cividale.

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<sup>69</sup> G.F. Ellero, *Buja. Terra e popolo* cit., pages 149-150.

<sup>70</sup> M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa 1945-1957*, Donzelli, Rome 2008, pages 213-218; J.D. Steinert, *L'accordo di emigrazione italo-tedesco e il reclutamento di manodopera italiana negli anni Cinquanta*, in J. Petersen, (edited by), *L'emigrazione tra Italia e Germania* cit., pages 160-161

The first period of Italian emigration to the German Federal republic was not happy. In spite of the helpfulness of the reception (in 1956 there were 100,000 Italian workers), the first emigrants complained about the low level of the salaries compared to France and Switzerland, the harsh conditions of work, the violation of the contracts on the part of the entrepreneurs, the living conditions and the poor diet<sup>71</sup>. Part of the difficulties they met arose from the fact that the information concerning the conditions of employment given by official channels was incomplete, in that many Friulian agricultural workers went to work in the building trade or emigrated to other countries. The recruitment of agricultural workers for the farms was already temporarily suspended in 1957 for better conditions and treatment<sup>72</sup>.

Germany joining the European Common Market had the effect of liberalizing the presence of foreign workers from the registered recruitment programme and made emigration to Germany a mass experience. If the building trade and mining in the region of the Ruhr continued to be the main source of work<sup>73</sup>, from the end of the 1950s Friulian and Italian workers, attracted by the higher salaries began to find work in the industrial sector as turners, electricians and welders in the metallurgic industry, in particular in the industries allied to car manufacturing in the South-West regions such as Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg and in the big centres of Bielefeld, Frankfurt, Cologne, Munich, Stuttgart and its suburbs (Esslingen, Feuerbach and Ludwigsburg)<sup>74</sup>. Between 1959 and 1967 West Germany attracted 15,503 Friulian emigrants (13.7%), third region behind France (16,350 expatriates, 14.45%) and Switzerland (53,389 emigrants 47%)<sup>75</sup>. The wish to get higher wages, the chance of working in industry and getting out of the tiring building trade were the principle reasons for this move. Sivigliano Bet, who left in 1962 with other unskilled labourers and brick workers from Barcis, wrote:

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<sup>71</sup> *Note di Emigrazione*, «La Voce Amica. Bollettino della pieve arcipretale di Gemona», September 1956, n. 9, page 4.

<sup>72</sup> G. Di Caporiacco, *Storia e statistica dell'emigrazione dal Friuli e dalla Carnia. Volume secondo. Da dopo la grande guerra al 1966*, Published by Friuli Nuovo, Udine 1969, page 156

<sup>73</sup> *Ti rosajanski po sfëtu. I resiani nel mondo*, Comune di Resia, 2001, pages 20-21; 44-45 e F. Micelli-J. Grossutti (edited by), *Comeglianots pal mont. I Comeglianotti nel mondo*, Udine, Designgraf, Comune di Comeglians, 2002

<sup>74</sup> See the statements in J. Grossutti, *Chei di Puçù pal mont. I pozzuolesi nel mondo*, Tavagnacco, Arti Grafiche friulane, Comune di Pozzuolo del Friuli, 2004

<sup>75</sup> Istat, *Annuari del lavoro e dell'emigrazione*. Ad annos.

In 1962 I too emigrated as a building worker and afterwards, as I was forced to sleep in a shack with frequent bouts of violence I preferred to go and work in a factory and after I had my father taken on too. I attended evening school for three years and I took my diploma in mechanics and then I chose to work as a turner and I always did the same job. We were in Ludvingshafen. With the work in the factory I reached a certain level of independence; my employer gave me a small flat but in 1970 I returned home to get married<sup>76</sup>.

Most of the Friulian work force were young, having their first experience in industry and often they were put in the lowest jobs in the factory hierarchy and so the rates of turnover and broken contracts in the car industry were particularly high in the first months of work<sup>77</sup>. The difficulties which the Friulians had also came from the fact that they had a low level of education and professional training, situations which needed special courses to answer the needs of the German market. The difficult conditions they had in the factories they also faced outside work, the companies did not always offer lodgings to the workers who often had to sleep in big dormitories, and when lodgings were provided they were often not in very good condition. One emigrant from San Giorgio di Nogaro working in a factory recalled: «I had everything in one room, the plates in the wardrobe, a bed, bathroom and kitchen all together»<sup>78</sup>. The memories of the emigrants tended to focus on the difficulties of fitting into German society, to the instances of isolation and self isolation, particularly in the case of women. However there are examples of those who wanted to learn the language, to improve their professional skills, to integrate and be accepted at work and in the local community. Generally speaking the memories of working in the factories and of German society are positive even if there were difficult moments, instances of exploitation and racism on the part of the local

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<sup>76</sup> N. Boz, *Parâ via. L'emigrazione da Barcis*, Sequals, Comune di Barcis, 2004, page 155

<sup>77</sup> A. Von Oswald, "Venite a lavorare alla Volkswagen!" *Strategie aziendali e reazioni degli emigrati italiani a Wolfsburg 1962-1975*, in S. Musso (edited by), *Tra fabbrica e società. Mondi operai nell'Italia del Novecento*, «Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli», Feltrinelli, Milan, 1997, page 702.

<sup>78</sup> Statement taken from [www.sangiorgioinsieme.it](http://www.sangiorgioinsieme.it). With regard to the emigration to Germany of Friulians from the Slav part of Friuli compare G. Meneghel-F. Battigelli, *Contributi geografici allo studio dei fenomeni migratori in Italia. Analisi di due comuni campione delle Prealpi Giulie: Lusevera e Savogna*, Published by Pacini, Pisa 1977, pages 52; 70-71; 146-147

populace but also among the Italians themselves<sup>79</sup>. The development of the migratory chains allowed difficulties to be partially cushioned and to find better paid positions. The reuniting of families, which usually happened after a few years, showed a desire for stability and an autonomous existence. The women worked in the factories with their husbands, they devoted themselves to domestic life or they found positions in the lowest level of the services industry as shop assistants, bar workers, clerks, hairdressers and dressmakers. Family ties and friendships enabled new arrivals to fit in, Armido wrote the following to Giordano in July 1964:

They told me that your son, Silvano, wants to come to Germany as soon as he finishes at the Malignani, tell him to write and tell me what diploma he gets and I'll speak to my boss and see if he can take him on with us or he can tell me where he could go, but don't worry about him, if he's a good boy like you said, there's plenty of work here and the pay is good<sup>80</sup>.

Those who worked in factories managed to get a reasonable standard of living and work and therefore a reasonable social life. The opportunities for work, the good pay, have placed Germany, even if it has often been put in the shade by Switzerland, as a good example of economic well being, efficiency and strictness in the collective imagination. In spite of this the letters of the emigrants show how difficult it was to stay abroad, how they looked forward to finishing their contracts and the interest they paid to the communities they had left. They worked with a sense of responsibility as Pierin from Germany wrote in July 1963: «You have to take what God sends you, and if you have to make this sacrifice, do it»<sup>81</sup>, a sacrifice made to pay off debts, buy a house and new equipment for the land<sup>82</sup>.

The insistence with which the emigrants waited for new opportunities for work in Italy or a definitive return were also determined by the fact that very often they

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<sup>79</sup> G. Di Caporiacco, *Storia e statistica dell'emigrazione dal Friuli e dalla Carnia* cit., page 91.

<sup>80</sup> Lettera citata in A. Bongiormo-A. Barbina, *Il pane degli altri. Lettere di emigranti*, Edizioni la Situazione, Udine 1970, page 86

<sup>81</sup> Letter mentioned in A. Bongiormo-A. Barbina, *Il pane degli altri* cit., page 24

<sup>82</sup> E. Saraceno, *Emigrazione e rientri, Il Friuli-Venezia Giulia nel secondo dopoguerra*, Udine, Il Campo 1981, pages 11; 89-90.



were forced to live a precarious existence, because of the German political policy which embraced a "rotation" model of migration based on short contracts which prevented the foreigners from integrating and maintained that their families could only join them if they had suitable housing. The Friulians, strictly controlled by the authorities and often confined to workers' quarters, did not feel "at home" and this made them stay for only limited periods in Germany, just enough time to save a little capital. The number of those returning home was therefore very high and the German economy was a way to find in the Southern Italian and Friulian work force a flexible and helpful answer to the needs of the industrial growth which characterized the years of the "miracle economy"<sup>83</sup>.

The experience of the Friulians in Germany came to an end around the middle of the 1970s, coinciding with the outcome of the oil crisis. The negative economic trend resulted in a drastic reduction in the employment of emigrant workers and a scaling down of their presence. As can be seen in the statistics, the return of individual workers and their families became more frequent after 1974, a return movement which is reflected in the number of those leaving which was notably reduced from 1971 to 1974 from 881 to 184<sup>84</sup>. The earthquake which hit Friuli in 1976 and the increase in the regional work market where the professional competences acquired abroad could be used accelerated the numbers returning and people no longer needed to leave, thus confirming emigration as a "short term aim". In any case the Friulian presence in Germany, brought about by new opportunities in European unification does not seem to lessen; in fact the current mobility of qualified workers and students confirms the attractiveness of one of the main "engines" of the European economy.

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<sup>83</sup> E. Pugliese, *In Germania*, in P. Bevilacqua-A. De Clementi-E. Franzina (edited by), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, vol. II, Arrivi, Donzelli, Rome, 2002, page 125

<sup>84</sup> Cres, *Movimenti migratori in Friuli Venezia Giulia: 1960-1979. Una indagine orientativa*, Udine, novembre 1977, page 39; e *Indagine sulle caratteristiche dei lavoratori che rimpatriano dopo un periodo all'estero*, June 1979, page 9

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