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**TRADE UNIONS AND  
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
IN THE ITALIAN METALWORKING SECTOR**

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# TRADE UNIONS AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE ITALIAN METALWORKING SECTOR

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### **Abbreviations used in the text**

CGL = Confederazione generale del lavoro [General Confederation of Labor]: the principal Italian trade union in the early 20th century.

CGIL = Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro [Italian General Confederation of Labor]: the historical trade union of the Italian left, connected first with the Italian Communist Party (PCI), then with the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), now with the Left Democrats (DS).

CISL = Confederazione italiana sindacati liberi [Italian Free Unions Confederation]: the trade union close to the Catholic Church, constituted in 1948 after a schism with the CGIL.

UIL = Unione italiana lavoratori [Italian Workers Union]: the union close to the Republicans and Social Democrats, it, too, constituted in 1948 after a schism with the CGIL.

FIOM = Metalworkers' union of the CGIL.

FIM = Metalworkers' union of the CISL.

UILM = Metalworkers' union of the UIL.

FLM = Federazione unitaria dei lavoratori metalmeccanici [Unitary Metalworkers' Federation]: formed by the union of the FIOM, FIM and UILM in 1972, it was dissolved in 1984.

ANOLF = Associazione nazionale oltre le frontiere [Beyond Borders National Association]: assistance association for immigrant workers constituted by the CISL.

ARCI = Associazione ricreativa culturale italiana [Italian Cultural and Recreational Association]: politico-cultural organization close to the Italian left, engaged in the defense of immigrants' rights.

ISTAT = Istituto nazionale di statistica: the Italian Central Statistics Office.

RSU = Rappresentanza sindacale unitaria: trade-union organization at the company level, present in the workplace, composed for the most part of delegates directly elected by the workers, along with a few workers nominated by the provincial union of the sector.

T.U. = Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione: compendium of all the laws and regulations on immigration.

▶ *The text of the Report was written by Filippo Perazza (sections 1, 2, 3), Andrea De Bonis (section 4), and Elisa Banfi (section 5); it was entirely revised and restructured by Pietro Basso and Fabio Perocco, who also wrote the concluding remarks (section 6).*

▶ *The Report was translated by Giacomo Donis.*

## SECTION 1

### SECTOR CHARACTERISTICS

#### 1. Brief historical overview of the sector

The metalworking sector plays a central role in the Italian manufacturing industry<sup>1</sup>. It employs 41.2% of the industry's workers and produces 7.9% of the value added of the entire national economy. 49.1% of the country's exports and 45.1% of its imports regard this production sector. It must be said, however, that since the 1970s this branch of industry has been in the throes of a deep crisis that has led to substantial downsizing, principally due to two factors: market saturation and the appearance of new competitors at a global level.

But let us begin with a brief historical overview of the metalworking sector in Italy. The second world war brought about the destruction of the bulk of the country's iron and steel plants, indispensable resources for the metalworking industry. In particular, the continuous-process plants in Bagnoli and Piombino were destroyed, while the Fiat plant in Turin and the Falk and Breda plants in Sesto San Giovanni, which produced cast iron and steel in electric furnaces, emerged practically unscathed.

As a result, in 1945, the Italian metalworking industry found itself severely handicapped by a limited and costly iron and steel production. With the cost of iron and steel materials accounting for fully 30% of the industry's total costs of production, it was vitally important to obtain an abundant steel production at internationally competitive costs. It was the funding provided by the Marshall Plan that made this possible, serving for the reconstruction of the blast-furnace plants in Bagnoli and Piombino and the construction of a new plant in Cornigliano.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bianco, M., *L'industria italiana*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003; Diemoz, R., *Dal decollo industriale alla crisi dello sviluppo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984; Morandi, R., *Storia della grande industria in Italia*, Turin: Einaudi, 1966; Nardozi, G., *Miracolo e declino*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2004; Romeo, R., *Breve storia della grande industria in Italia*, Naples: Capelli, 1967; Roverato, G., *Per una storia dell'impresa: nascita e sviluppo della grande impresa*, Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1992; Salvati, M., *Economia e politica in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi*, Milan: Garzanti, 1984; Scalfari, E., *Rapporto sul neocapitalismo in Italia*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1961.

In the post-war period the metalworking sector has been a driving force for the Italian economy. In a first phase, up to 1958, its development was generated almost exclusively by the rise in domestic demand. The production of this sector served to reconstruct the country's production structures and infrastructures. But the sector also benefited from the progressive upturn in consumption favored by the growth in national income, which in the early 1960s boasted a 6% annual increase.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s there was also a rise in foreign demand, spurred by the constitution of the European Common Market (Treaty of Rome, 1957) and, above all, by the highly competitive prices of Italian products on world markets. The availability of a substantial number of reserve workers coming from the southern and the economically depressed northeastern regions of the country permitted the large Italian metalworking enterprises - concentrated prevalently in the northwest - to have one of the lowest labor costs in Europe. Indeed, internal immigration had a price-controlling effect on salaries. After the expansion of the sector due exclusively to the domestic demand for durable goods (especially means of transportation), its growth continued, as we said, driven by the demand for export articles. And investments for plants and machinery continued to pour into the sector, at more than twice the rate of the early 1950s.

The metalworking sector was characterized by the presence of a number of large companies. The most important was unquestionably Fiat, whose mass of profits and number of employees made it the largest firm in Italy. Olivetti, too, was a major success story: in 1960 it produced 27% of the typewriters on the world market. Piaggio, leader in the production of mopeds, Ansaldo, and Breda represented other important enterprises in the sector.

Along with the large firms, in some divisions of the sector we also find medium firms springing up. This was the case with electric household appliances, a division in which firms such as Candy, Ignis and Zanussi in the 1960s made Italy the world's third-largest producer of refrigerators and the largest producer in Europe of washing machines and dishwashers.

In the metalworking sector private initiative was flanked by a significant presence of the state, both in military and in civil production. This was strengthened in the post-war period by the constitution of new financial institutions in the IRI<sup>2</sup> sphere, such as the Finmeccanica in 1948

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<sup>2</sup> IRI, the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction, a public institution founded by the Fascists in 1931 to direct the rescue of Italian industry; it greatly expanded its activities after the war.

and the Fincantieri in 1959, and the creation of the “Fondo per il finanziamento dell’industria meccanica”<sup>3</sup> (FIM) in 1947.

Between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s the firms of the Italian metalworking sector suffered a sharp fall in profits. The progressive saturation of the markets and the onslaught of new competitors from countries such as Japan and South Korea, where labor costs were substantially lower, marked the beginning of a deep crisis in the sector, made worse by the oil crises of 1973 and 1979 and the surge in labor unrest. It was precisely this unrest that sparked a reorganization of the sector, paving the way for the introduction of new production models capable of increasing flexibility and lowering labor costs.

The Fordist model that had dominated the large-scale Italian metalworking industry in the 1950s and 1960s proved incapable of responding to the new needs. Production, now severed from demand, generated products in excess of the real capacities of consumption. And, with this model, relatively rapid reconversion or reduction of production was not possible. This crisis of the Fordist model led to the introduction of new models of production organization that - through a tighter link between supply and demand, and recourse to subcontracting - permitted firms to better regulate production and the use of labor power *according to the needs of the market*. In this way, large companies sought to stem and to reverse their drop in profits.

A compelling symbol of the application of the new Toyotaist production model in this sector was the birth, in the early 1990s, of the Fiat-Sata plant in the small town of Melfi, in Basilicata. This plant, with its ancillary industries, is not only one of the largest production centers in Europe; it is also high on the list in terms of the productivity - and intensity - of its labor.

The crisis of the 1970s and the successive production transformations radically changed the structure of the metalworking sector. Not all the large firms were able to make the necessary changes, and for some of them - Olivetti, for example - the crisis represented the beginning of an inexorable decline.

There was also a major change in the geographical distribution of the production centers. The large enterprises opened their new plants, designed to produce according to the new logic, either in areas where there was already a small metalworking industry that could play an ancillary role, or where there was an economic and social situation that permitted the firm to impose its conditions across the board, on workers and unions alike. Melfi, for example, is in an area of southern Italy with a particularly high unemployment rate; this made it possible for Fiat to obtain from the unions particularly important derogations of the ban on night work for women,

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<sup>3</sup> Fund for the Financing of the Metalworking Industry.

of the "normal" shift system, of the methods for measuring the speed of the assembly line - to say nothing of wages that were 30% lower than in Fiat plants in the north.

The shift of the bulk of metalworking production away from its concentration in the northwest was also due to the ability of middle-sized firms to adapt quickly to the new modalities of production. The most dynamic of these firms, thanks also to the greater capital at their disposal, rapidly came to dominate the less dynamic firms of the sector, compelling them to become their subcontractors (or to close). This was the case especially in regions of the northeast where a great number of both small and middle firms had long been present.

In recent decades two other phenomena have changed the profile of the metalworking sector: privatization and the outsourcing of an increasing part of industrial production to Eastern Europe.

The Italian state, which in the 1960s managed to rescue many industrial groups of the sector through IRI, especially in the iron and steel industry, in the 1990s carried out a series of privatizations, according to neoliberal tenets. The privatizations led to massive restructuring that cut the number of employees and in many cases put an end to the state support that had been instrumental in maintaining the competitiveness of the firms. An example of this process is what occurred at the colossus of Italian metalworking, Finmeccanica. The state - which through IRI was majority shareholder of the enterprise, the full-fledged holding company of the sector - progressively withdrew, selling all its shares in civil production and maintaining control of military production alone.

In the metalworking industry, outsourcing to the East began in the late 1980s. Especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall many firms, including middle-to-small ones, began moving their production facilities to the countries of Eastern Europe. This ongoing phenomenon has been generated by the low-cost and high-quality labor power available in those countries, and has led to a sharp downsizing of the number of firms and employees in this sector in Italy. In this case, too, it was Fiat that set things in motion, with the creation and development of its plants in Poland.

The recent downsizing of the Italian metalworking industry, however, does not solely or principally depend on the process of outsourcing production to the East; it is, rather, a reflection of Italy's broader process of decline in the international division of labor. It is the Italian economy as a whole that has been downsized, both by the events of 1989 and by the process of financial globalization of the past twenty years. In fact, with the fall of the Berlin Wall Italy lost the *situation rent* it had enjoyed for nearly half a century in which it functioned as hinge-nation between West and East, "watched" with particular attention by both Washington and Moscow.

What is more, Italy was substantially disadvantaged by the qualitative leap in the centralization of financial capital that began in the early 1980s, since the country - compared to its competitors - is afflicted by a chronic (relative) shortage of liquid capital. If, to the negative effects of these two processes, we add the appearance on the world scene of new major players precisely in the industrial sectors that have traditionally been the most developed sectors in Italy, then we can understand why Italian industry has found itself in a situation of almost permanent uncertainty for years, and is forced to witness the decline, if not the out-and-out disappearance, of such major firms as Italsider, Sir, Montedison, Olivetti, and Parmalat. This decline is still going on, also in the metalworking sector.

## **2. The current situation in the sector**

Today new signs of crisis are coming from various segments of the sector. In the automaking division the crisis of the Fiat group has assumed huge proportions. According to Federmeccanica estimates, the crisis of the sector concerns approximately 1,000,000 workers and directly threatens 40,000 jobs: 10,000 directly employed workers and 30,000 in ancillary firms. While industrial vehicle production has bucked the trend, it is nonetheless at risk due to lack of investment.

The situation in moped and motorcycle production is not good, with a 6% drop in yearly sales. There has also been a drop in orders for machine tools, which fell by 9% in 2002. After the privatization of the 1990s, the iron and steel industry witnessed a drastic decrease in the number of its plants, from 68 in 1990 to 42 in 2000. Transportation and the aerospace industry, which have particular links with state investment, have been affected by the cuts in public spending. Apart from the arms industry, the only segments of the sector that have shown a positive trend are shipbuilding and the production of electric household appliances.

The outcome of this long process of crises and of (never-ending) restructuring is that today most of the enterprises of the sector are middle-to-small firms, which means that the entire sector is far more exposed to the assault of international competition than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

Tab. 1 – Firms and employees by firm size

Firm size	Number of firms	Number of employees
1	12.315	12.315
2	6.279	12.558
3-5	8.314	31.806
6-9	6.752	49.811
10-15	7.109	87.544
16-19	3.225	55.945
20-49	9.474	285.463
50-99	2.671	187.040
100-199	1.326	181.097
200-249	222	49.424
250-499	414	140.630
500-999	150	104.559
1000 and more	109	389.578
Totale	58.360	1.587.770

Source: [www.federmeccanica.it/pubbl/f01g.html](http://www.federmeccanica.it/pubbl/f01g.html)

Wages in the sector are among the highest in the manufacturing industry, and to a large extent this is due to the high rate of unionization of the workers, and of the metalworkers in particular. ISTAT reports that between 2001 and 2003, with a rise in prices of 5%, in the metalworking sector there was a rise in contractual wages of 5.4%, with a 6.2% rise in real wages (in firms with over 500 employees). However, these are before-tax figures that cannot give us an idea of the real value of the wages. What is more, these figures do not take into account the great number of workers who are undocumented, especially in the ancillary firms, with wages lower than the contractual average. It also needs to be stressed that production intensity in the metalworking sector is particularly high; so if it is true that nominal and real wages are also particularly high, the same cannot be said for relative wages.

### 3. Zanussi

Before the second world war Zanussi was little more than an artisan firm, employing just 40 workers and producing only 6,000 pieces a year; it was not until immediately after the war that it assumed a properly industrial dimension<sup>4</sup>. In 1947 the firm, with a single factory in

<sup>4</sup> About Zanussi see: Anderlini, F., *Ristrutturazione aziendale e melanconia operaia. Il caso Zanussi-Electrolux di Susegana*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993; Dina, A., *Elettrodomestici flessibili. La ristrutturazione Zanussi-Electrolux*, Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990.

Pordenone employing only 90 workers, was producing a single article: cooking-stoves. In 1951 it began to diversify, with the construction of the first Rex brand gas stoves and ranges, bringing the number of its employees to 300. It made a qualitative leap in 1954 with the construction of its Porcia plant for the production of refrigerators. The firm was now employing 700 people. Refrigerator production grew rapidly: from 1,000 pieces in 1954 to 3,000 the following year and 10,000 in 1956. In 1957 in Valloncello, near Pordenone, Zanussi set up a new firm, Iemat, for the production of electrical components, automatic vendors and other accessories. In 1958, in the wake of its ongoing success with refrigerators, it also began to produce washing machines. There were two basic reasons for Zanussi's rapid growth in the 1950s: first, a great supply of labor power, since there were few employment opportunities in the region; and second, a growing demand for electric household appliances, sparked by the increased purchasing power of the middle and the working classes generated by the economic development of the country. The absence of labor unrest was an important factor in the rise in profits at Zanussi. The firm obtained this result by exploiting the divisions within the trade-union movement and choosing to deal with only one part of it, the CISL, which was willing to engage in "concertation"<sup>5</sup>; at the same time, it took repressive measures - including dismissals - against workers who showed left-wing sympathies, or who rejected the working conditions imposed by the firm, such as Sunday shifts. Zanussi's hiring policy - or strategy - was one more important factor: the bulk of the work force was composed of women, because they could be paid much less than men for the same jobs and workloads.

In the late 1950s the Pordenone firm reorganized its distribution network. The network of agents and representatives spread all over the country was replaced by a chain of branch offices in the main cities. This made it possible for the firm to reduce the costs of distribution, creating closer links between distributors and the directives issued by headquarters and thus boosting sales. This was the basis of the rootedness that was to give the company a certain stability on the national market in the following years.

In Italy in 1960 Zanussi boasted 8,000 licensed dealers, 30 distribution centers with depositories and structures for technical and commercial assistance, and 250 vehicles equipped to deliver stocks, spare parts and accessories all over the country. Export, too, which began in the late 1950s, was taking hold, with 62,000 exported pieces in 1961. In the early 1960s Zanussi was a firm employing 2,500 people, 1,500 of them at the Porcia plant in Pordenone alone.

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<sup>5</sup> "Concertazione" (*Mitbestimmung* in German) denotes systematic collaboration between management and labor. The CISL has always been in favor of this form of "systemic" agreement; the CGIL accepted the principle in certain periods, but sharply rejected it in others.

The 1960s and a good part of the 1970s were years of substantial growth for the Zanussi group. The firm made up for the recession of 1963-64 by operating as a subcontractor for the large European groups of the sector, producing thousands of pieces for Aeg, Lunde, Neckermann. At the same time, thanks to the introduction of new and sophisticated technologies, the period also marked the beginning of a long phase of labor intensive production at Zanussi. The firm began to produce televisions and dishwashers - the latter meeting with particularly great success.

Despite the large-scale resumption of labor struggles, which began in the early 1960s with the contract dispute of the electromechanical workers and culminated in the "hot autumn"<sup>6</sup> of 1969, working at Zanussi in that period meant having to bear extremely heavy working conditions. The unions denounced the health dangers to which Zanussi employees were exposed, especially the workers employed in nickel-plating, enameling, varnishing, with plastics, or at the furnaces for polyurethane production - succeeding, for one of the very first times in Italy, in obtaining a cash compensation for the workers and, above all, in implementing measures to improve the work environment. The union grievances also regarded qualifications. In fact, workers were arbitrarily assigned qualifications that did not reflect the jobs they actually did. The struggle for equitable qualifications was closely linked with the claim for equal treatment of men and women. Women were relegated to the lowest qualifications and received lower wages than men for the same jobs. Other bones of contention between management and labor were piece-work, breaks, hours, the canteen and - in general - wages, which were among the lowest of this segment of the metalworking industry in Italy.

Throughout the 1960s Zanussi continued to rake in large profits - thanks, above all, to the above-mentioned working conditions, especially the low wages and high work pace, which the firm was able to impose on its workers by taking advantage of the socio-economic context of the region. In those years, the Italian northeast was still economically depressed and the alternatives to employment at Zanussi were few and unappealing.

Zanussi was able to attenuate the effects of the crisis of the 1970s through the diversification of its production, which it had been pursuing since the 1950s, and thanks to its presence on a variety of national markets. Moreover, as a medium - not yet a large - firm, it was not overly affected by the stagnancy of the markets. But in the late 1970s the crisis made itself felt at Zanussi too. The firm entered a turbulent period, and only came out of it in 1984 when Zanussi

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<sup>6</sup> The "autunno caldo" was the "hot autumn" of 1969, so called because of the great wave of labor and popular unrest that swept through the country from north to south.

was acquired by the Swedish multinational, Electrolux. Only then, with the arrival of fresh capital and with the introduction of a new *production model*, the Toyota system, which gave it the possibility of obtaining greater flexibility in its use of the work force and in production, did profits at Zanussi rise once again.

## SECTION 2

### WORK TRANSFORMATIONS

#### 1. From Fordism to Toyotaim

The new “production model”, the Toyota production system first perfected in Japan by Taiichi Ohno<sup>7</sup>, has proved better suited than Fordism to the current stage of the market economy and to that which Galbraith has called “the age of uncertainty”. We believe, then, that in the interests of our study it will be useful to discuss the main features of this model and the impact it has had on the relations between trade unions and entrepreneurs - at Zanussi, and in general. But let us first recall that the most organic attempt to transfer Toyotaim to Italy was, indeed, in the metalworking sector, at the Fiat plant in Melfi.<sup>8</sup>

We would have a great deal to say about the historical roots and original features of Toyotaim, and about its transfer to the United States first and then to Europe; and just as much to say about the true or presumed alternativity between Ohnoism-Toyotaim and Taylorism-Fordism. However, the nature of this report induces us to concentrate our discussion on just a few essential aspects and to focus more on the differences between Toyotaim and Fordism than on their continuity.

In the first place, the Toyota system is characterized by a tighter connection between production and demand than is the case in Fordism. The production process is activated only at the moment in which a product is requested. This makes it possible to avoid the high costs of storage, since the warehouse either is entirely eliminated, or only serves to respond to the needs of a sudden

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<sup>7</sup> Ohno, T., *Lo spirito Toyota*, Turin: Einaudi, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> See Basso, P., *Tempi moderni, orari antichi. L'orario di lavoro a fine secolo*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1998; translated by Donis, G., *Modern Times, Ancient Hours. Working Lives in the Twenty-first Century*, London and New York: Verso, 2003; Rieser, V., *Lavorare a Melfi*, Rome: Calice Editori, 1997; Caputo, P., *Lavorare in team alla Fiat da Melfi a Cordoba*, Naples: Immaginapoli, 2004; Chiaromonte, F., *Sindacato, ristrutturazione, organizzazione del lavoro*, Rome: Editrice sindacale italiana, 1978; Riviello A.M. (a cura di), *La rincorsa. Melfi, inchiesta sulle operaie delle fabbriche dell'auto*, Rome: Calice, 2003.

increase in demand. As with Fordism production is highly standardized, but the purchaser does have the possibility of selecting certain features (albeit within a range of predefined “alternatives”).

This system of production organization *structurally* avails itself of subcontracting for entire phases of fabrication. The structural recourse to subcontracting consists in a large firm’s steady placing of production orders to smaller firms that, according to the type of fabrication or service required, do their jobs on or off the premises of the subcontracting firm. All phases of production - by the small subcontractors and by the workers of the subcontracting firm alike - are coordinated by the "mother" firm according to a logic termed "just in time," designed for the optimization of working time and, thus, the greatest possible intensification of labor.

Subcontracting makes it possible for large firms to obtain a lower cost of labor by spurring competition between their subcontractors. Indeed, orders are placed with the firms that can ensure fastest delivery and lowest cost. To this end subcontractors seek to intensify the work pace, oblige workers to prolong working hours beyond contracted limits, and not infrequently have recourse to undocumented labor. Recourse to subcontractors also gives large firms the advantage of greater labor flexibility. By placing - or by canceling - a production order with a subcontractor, the large firm is rapidly able to adjust its employment of labor power to a rise or fall in demand.

For our study, the capacity of this new model of organization to limit trade-union activity is of particular interest. Indeed, the dampening of labor activism is a primary factor in the entrepreneur's decision to adopt this model. The Toyota system seeks to discourage union membership by systematically promoting company spirit and obfuscating the hierarchical relations existing within firms. The aim is to convince workers that company prosperity and their own interests *coincide*, thus making the union appear superfluous, if not downright detrimental, in the eyes of the workers. The Toyota system, moreover, by offering incentives to the individual and stirring up competition between workers, seeks to undermine that unity of workers which is the foundation of labor activism. The awarding of differentiated and "secret" production bonuses to *individual* workers and the obligation imposed on the workers of every production team to make up for their companions' absence or work not done are practices that create friction between workers and hinder the creation of relations of reciprocal solidarity.

In any event, the decentralization of entire phases of production is perhaps the most effective impediment to the participation in trade-union activities. Employees of the ancillary firms are compelled to compete with one another by the competition the mega-firms (the *keiretsu*) trigger between the small or medium firms that work for them. A production order placed with a firm

other than their own could well cost them their jobs. "Thanks" to this mechanism, workers are impelled to see the other small or medium subcontractors and - worse still - their employees *as their antagonists* and to hold *them* - rather than Toyotaism or the "mother" firm - responsible for the working conditions to which they are subject. It is clear that - *to the extent that the system works* - such a mechanism constitutes a formidable antidote to the unity of workers that is the bedrock of the labor movement. By the same token, let us not forget that in small and medium firms *nonmembership* in the union is often decisive in obtaining and keeping one's job.

## SECTION 3

### SECTOR TRADE UNIONS

#### 1. The metalworkers' unions, yesterday and today

There has always been a conflictual relationship between the entrepreneurs of the metalworking sector (and the Italian industrialists in general) and the metalworkers' union - especially the FIOM<sup>9</sup>. Without going all the way back to the birth of the Italian trade-union movement and of the "Camere del lavoro,"<sup>10</sup> both received with hostility by the industrial bourgeoisie, we shall limit ourselves to recalling the central role played by the metalworkers' union in the "biennio rosso"<sup>11</sup> (1919-1920).

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<sup>9</sup> Aa.Vv., *Cisl 1948-1968. Ispirazione cattolica, scelta di classe, nuovo sindacato*, Messina-Reggio Emilia: Hobelix-Bonhoeffer, 1980; Aa.Vv., *Le scissioni sindacali. Italia e Europa*, Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 1999; Accornero, A., *La parabola del sindacato, Ascesa e declino di una cultura*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992; Alosco, A., *Alle radici del sindacalismo: la ricostruzione della CGL nell'Italia liberata, 1943-1944*, Milan: Sugarco, 1979; Albers, D., *Il sindacato in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, Rome: Editrice Sindacale Italiana, 1979; Bezza, B., *Le lotte degli elettromeccanici*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1981; Bezza, B. (a cura di), *Lavoratori e movimento sindacale in Italia dal 1944 agli anni 70*, Milan: Morano Editore, 1972; Boni, P., *Fiom – 100 anni di un sindacato industriale*, Rome: Meta-Ediesse, 1993; Chinello, C., *Classe, movimento, organizzazione*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1984; Chinello, C. (a cura di), *Metalmecanici: vita, lavoro e sindacato in 126 interviste*, Rome: Meta Edizioni, 2002; *FLM. La storia, le immagini*, Città di Castello: Petrucci, 1994; Foa, V., *La cultura della CGIL: scritti e interventi 1950-1970*, Turin: Einaudi, 1984; Foa, V., *Sindacati e lotte operaie 1943-1973*, Turin: Loescher, 1975; Lisanti, N., *Il movimento operaio in Italia: 1860-1980*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1986; Liuzzi, F., *L' autonomia sindacale dal Patto di Roma agli anni '70*, Rome: Editrice Sindacale Italiana, 1975; Manghi, B. – Cella, G.P. – Piva, P., *Un sindacato italiano negli anni '60. La Fim Cisl dall' associazionismo alla classe*, Bari: De Donato, 1972; Martinet, G., *Sette sindacati per sette paesi*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1980; Messia, A., *Storia e storie dei metalmecanici – Quarant'anni di esperienza Uilm*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1994; Pizzorno, A., *I soggetti del pluralismo. Classi, partiti, sindacati*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980; Pugno, E. – Garavini, S., *Gli anni duri alla Fiat*, Turin: Einaudi, 1974; Romiti, C., *Questi anni alla Fiat*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1988; Turone, S., *Il paradosso sindacale*, Rome and Bari: Laterza 1979; Turone, S., *Storia del sindacato in Italia: dal 1943 ad oggi*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> "Camere del lavoro" were territorial organizations (almost always at the provincial level) of the CGIL.

<sup>11</sup> "Biennio rosso," the "red biennium" 1919-1920, so called on account of the heated political and labor unrest directed by the Socialist party.

These were the years immediately after the first world war, when Italy's dramatic economic crisis heightened social tensions, generating massive labor and popular demonstrations throughout the country. There were 22 million strike days in 1919, 30 million in 1920 (compared to just over 4 million between 1911 and 1914). But this labor activism bore important fruit: a wage increase of 20%, a hike in overtime pay, six vacation days per year, severance pay in the amount of two days' wages per year of service, bimonthly wage revision in relation to the rise in the cost of living. And, above all, the introduction of the 8-hour working day. One of the leading protagonists in this wave of labor struggles was the metalworkers' union, the FIOM, which also played a leading role in the creation of the factory councils, in which both union members and workers outside the union were urged to participate. The FIOM's avant-garde function was widely recognized by the mass of workers, who were quick to join it and to join the CGL (whose membership shot up from 250,000 in 1918 to 1,159,000 in 1919).<sup>12</sup> It is not fortuitous that Fascism, in its campaign to dismantle organized labor, devoted special "care" to the FIOM.

After the fall of Fascism, also in virtue of the Fiat-worker strikes in March of 1943, in Italy the labor movement made its official reappearance "from above." The Badoglio government assigned the management of the remains of the Fascist corporative unions to Grandi (for the Christian Democrats), Di Vittorio (for the Communists) and Buozzi (for the Socialists), while in June of 1944 the Treaty of Rome ratified the constitution of a unitary union: the CGIL. In the meantime, even before the arrival of the Allied forces in the north of the country, on 17 April 1944 the CLN<sup>13</sup> of Northern Italy issued a decree establishing "Management Councils" in the factories in the north. These Councils, composed of factory workers, technicians and clerks, had the task of contributing to the management of the factories. The parties of the CLN had different orientations, but agreed on the fact that "the solutions proposed by the Councils [must be] inspired by a single concern: that of an increase of production, to be realized even against the will of the monopolistic groups, in the interest both of the workers and of the entire national economy."<sup>14</sup>

The post-Fascist trade union and the Management Councils thus stemmed from the selfsame necessity - of the Badoglio government, on one hand, and the CLN, on the other - of bringing

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<sup>12</sup> See Maione, G., *Il biennio rosso*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> "Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale" = Committee for National Liberation: the political body that brought together all the anti-Fascist political parties in the period 1943-1945.

<sup>14</sup> See Lussu, E., "Il movimento sindacale dal 1945 al 1955", in Bezza, B. (a cura di), *Lavoratori e movimento sindacale in Italia da 1944 agli anni '70*, op. cit., p. 35.

the Italian proletariat into the postwar reconstruction effort. In the intentions of their creators, both the union and the Management Councils were to contribute to *neutralizing* class conflict, bringing about the social pacification of a nation weakened and deeply divided by the war - all to the advantage of national capitalism and its recovery. Astute nationalist propaganda urged the Italian working class to embrace an interclass vision in which the economic development of the country - the restructuring and productivity of its industry - were objectives the workers had to strive for just as much as - if not more than! - the entrepreneurs, if they were to improve their living conditions.

The union's underwriting of national interests is particularly evident in two of its decisions at the time: its acceptance of the unfreezing of dismissals, which led to a surge in unemployment (600,000 unemployed in June of 1946 and 2,000,000 the following year), and the truce on wages - measures accepted by the union, as its leaders explicitly admitted, in order to favor national development. But the Labor Plan itself, proposed by the CGIL in 1949 in opposition to the Marshall Plan (European Reconstruction Program), and the policy of De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats, both contained an explicit willingness to collaborate with the entrepreneurs to relaunch the national economy.

Nonetheless, the Italian working class, which had played a leading role in resisting Nazi-Fascism, which - we could say - was the *only* social class that mounted genuine resistance, did not desist from voicing its expectations and demands. Far from it. Even as it accepted (even in the part of it organized by the PCI<sup>15</sup>) the perspective of "national rebirth," the working class sought to assert its specific expectations, to affirm and promote its rights that had been so harshly violated in the previous twenty years and in the course of the war. And, once again, one of the main channels through which it attempted to do so was the union. First the unitary union, and then - after the schism of 1948 - the communist-led CGIL.

The season of trade-union unity determined "from above" was a short one (1944-1948), and was troubled by the profound ideological and political differences between the three components of that "unitary" union. With the breakdown of the governments of national unity and the advent of the cold war on an international scale, trade-union division was inevitable. And from division, opposition: specifically, between the CGIL and the CISL. The Catholic union, the CISL, advocated a business unionism borrowed from the labor movement in the United States, which subordinated the demands of workers to the health of the entrepreneurs and "chose" to concern itself *exclusively* with wages, and almost exclusively *at the company level*. The CGIL, for its

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<sup>15</sup> PCI = Italian Communist Party.

part, rejected company-by-company action. Instead, its program addressed the *entire* Italian working class, with the aim of improving *overall* working conditions and *reforming* national capitalism, making it more "popular" and "democratic." This opposition was fueled, in the case of the CISL, by burning anti-Communism, and in the case of the CGIL, by burning anti-Atlanticism. In this conflict Italian capitalism openly took the side of Catholic unionism, striking out against labor activism (many factory workers and laborers were killed by the police in the 1950s) and the CGIL.

In the metalworking sector the attack on CGIL members took place especially within the factories: the weapons were dismissal, search, transfer, discrimination. Once again, Fiat spearheaded the assault, establishing "punitive departments" in its plants, for workers tainted with left-wing political or union activities (namely, PCI or FIOM members or sympathizers). Indeed, Fiat hired a host of factory overseers, recruited from the police and the Carabinieri and charged with denouncing anyone even suspected of anti-Fiat sympathies, and a full-fledged "factory tribunal" was instituted. At the same time, social conflict was kept to a minimum throughout the 1950s also by the economic expansion spearheaded by the large "Fordist" enterprises. Profit growth was so great that entrepreneurs could take the liberty of "concerting" - with the more moderate unions (CISL and UIL) - a relative improvement in the workers' conditions and, especially, wages.

Meanwhile, in large factories, an exasperated mechanization - which in some cases became full-fledged automation - created the possibility of employing increasingly large contingents of assembly-line workers with no particular technical skills. Between the mid-1950s and early 1960s a very great number of workers moved from the south or other economically depressed areas of the country to the large industrial centers of the northwest. This period is also of great interest for our study because it constitutes the *first time* in which Italian trade unions were faced with the phenomenon of immigration, albeit an *internal* immigration. The unions, while not hostile to these workers, at least initially assumed an attitude of indifference. Indeed, their failure to give voice to the specific needs of these new workers led to the rise of an extremely vulnerable proletariat, which for a number of years proved to be an instrument of blackmail and division of the world of industrial labor in the hands of the entrepreneurs.

But the end of economic growth and the drop in profits compelled organized labor to rethink its attitudes and its relations with management. The first difficult conjuncture of the post-war Italian economy, in the two-year period 1963-1964, signaled the beginning of important changes. The center-left government had asked the unions to subscribe to a policy of *planning* that was, in fact, a *plan* to get them to renounce wages increases, which were accused of being

the cause of the contraction of production. In the name of "planning" firms were no longer willing to accept the workers requests, and even called into question rights that had already been obtained. The workers, for their part, thought it was high time to "collect" some "returns" on that economic development of which they considered themselves the protagonists: and instead - faced with the threat of a worsening of their condition! - began pressuring the unions to come to their defense.

And indeed, the union once again became a spokesman for the workers' demands, favored in its action also by certain characteristics of the production model prevailing at that time. The Fordist model, utilizing large production centers and homogenizing the condition of so many workers, effectively facilitated the socialization and unionization of these workers, thus laying the foundations for the overcoming of prejudices and divisions between local workers and those who had immigrated from the south. It is not fortuitous that the union initiatives of the late 1960s were characterized by the active participation of many internal immigrants from southern Italy, who had found jobs in factories in the north.

In this conjuncture, it is more appropriate to speak not of unions *in the plural* but of *union* in the singular, because the trade unions, and the metalworkers' unions in particular, have never been so closely united as they were in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was unquestionably due to the great activism of the workers, but also to a significant evolution of the FIM, the metalworkers' union of the CISL, which, besides its active participation in the struggles, took a position in favor of the workers' deeply-felt egalitarian demands and even went so far as to embrace demands made by the "comitati unitari di base."<sup>16</sup> What is more, the union structures in the workplace were completely renewed in that period, with the institution of the factory councils. It was in this context that the FLM, "Federazione unitaria dei lavoratori metalmeccanici,"<sup>17</sup> was constituted in Genoa in October of 1972. This metalworkers' federation stems from the confluence in a single structure of the FIOM, the FIM and the UILM, the metalworkers' union of the UIL - it, too, affected by the surge in factory-worker activism, even though most of its members were clerks.

The season of the *unitary metalworkers' union*, which lasted for 12 years, opened with impressive figures: 963,000 members and over 30,000 delegates in 1973. In that same year the FLM won what may well have been the most positive of all the contractual agreements in the entire post-war period: wage increases that were equal for everyone, and substantial; a single

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<sup>16</sup> "Comitati unitari di base" were politically-oriented trade union "committees" outside the three main trade unions and highly critical of them. They arose in the late 1960s, mostly in the northern regions.

<sup>17</sup> Unitary Federation of Metalworkers.

qualification framework for factory workers and clerks; a fourth week of vacation for all employees; 150 hours of paid leave for study purposes; a first reduction of working hours (for the iron and steel workers) to less than 40 hours a week. In those years the FLM also went beyond strictly contractual concerns and took important initiatives in support of southern Italy, even broaching the idea of a "new development model" together with the entire reformist political line-up. Even those trade-union sectors that had once reproached the FIOM with "getting into politics" were now lining up on a declaredly political terrain. But in spite of this excellent start, the FLM's path was not a smooth one. To say the least.

The first difficulty it ran up against, suffering serious damage, was - for a change - an attack by Fiat. Between 1979 and 1980 Fiat first dismissed 61 workers for political reasons, charging them with "anti-Fiat" behavior, and then laid off 24,000 employees, without the union's managing to mount a viable defense. Indeed, it was the company that managed to mobilize thousands of middle managers and clerks and have them demonstrate on the streets of Turin (the "march of the 40,000"), thus making their own original contribution to the defeat of the labor movement. In the wake of this defeat the components of the unitary union began to drift apart one again.

The second difficulty the FLM ran up against - and this one, a mortal blow - was the "income policy" enacted by the Italian governments of the early 1980s. In principle, at the CGIL general assembly held in Rome early in 1978 the entire Italian trade-union movement had subscribed to the notion that the Italian workers would have to make "necessary sacrifices" for the recovery of the national economy. But this acceptance in principle of the primacy of company objectives over the workers' necessities, which - as we have seen - was certainly nothing new, now was interpreted in different ways by the three trade unions (with further differences of interpretation within each one). These differences burst into *open conflict* in 1984, when the Craxi government - the first Socialist-led government in the history of Italy - sliced four points off the "scala mobile."<sup>18</sup> The CISL and the UIL acquiesced; the CGIL opposed the measure with a full-scale mobilization of the workers and a referendum - but did not meet with success. This conflict sealed the fate of the FLM, whose name survived only within the FISM, the

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<sup>18</sup> "Scala mobile" - sliding wage scale - is the mechanism by which wages are automatically adjusted to the cost of living. It was first introduced in Italy in 1945-1946, was strengthened (in the workers' favor) in 1976, and has been progressively dismantled since - as we see - 1984, when Craxi "sliced off" four points that had already come to maturity.

International Federation of Metalworkers' Unions, connected with the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions).<sup>19</sup>

Since the mid-1980s the Italian unions too, like the unions throughout Europe and in the United States, have had to face off against neoliberal policies and the process of globalization. And like other unions throughout the West, they have done so through continuous retreat, one step after another, in the largely unsuccessful attempt to control the damage. Indeed, the past twenty years have witnessed a considerable reduction in the organizational and political power of trade unions - metalworkers' unions included - and a considerable contraction of the "acquired rights" of workers. The advent of the "era of precariousness" and of that which Beck has called "the society of risk" has once more called into question, *on all levels*, the results of the labor and popular movements of the 1960s and 1970s. And in this context the divisions between unions have once again become more marked, even though the CGIL - the CISL - the UIL - have long pursued, in common, the prospect of "concertation" with the entrepreneurs and the government.

Let us recall the most important phases in the implementation of neoliberal policies in Italy. The first step was the agreement between the Spadolini government and the unions (in 1983) to curb the growth of wages. The second step was taken by the Craxi government the following year, when it cut four points off the "scala mobile." The third was the introduction of on-the-job training contracts that permitted firms to employ young workers for two years at apprentice wages (today, in fact, the average time needed to learn a job is far far shorter). The fourth was the generalized recourse to short-term and temporary contracts (which had been quite rare in the first four decades after the war). Then, in the 1990s, the measures came fast and furious. In 1991 a law was passed that liberalized dismissals. In 1992 the "scala mobile" was abolished. In 1993 wage growth was linked to the inflation rate "planned" by the government, which since then has always proved to be lower than the real rate of inflation. In 1996-1997 new forms of casual labor were instituted, in particular staff leasing and employment agency jobs.

This journey towards the institutionalization of casuality reached its culmination (for now) with the approval of Law number 30/2003, the so-called "Biagi law," which established new rules for all the forms of casual labor that had been introduced in the previous twenty years. The 'Biagi' list includes the deadly "job on call," which had repeatedly been rejected by the workers - and at times resoundingly so, as occurred at "our" Zanussi in Susegana. In nearly all these cases immigrant workers have had the "honor" of being the first to experience these new employment

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<sup>19</sup> See *FLM. La storia, le immagini*, op. cit., pp. 44-46.

relationships that are officially defined as "flexible" or "atypical," but which in time have become increasingly *rigid* and *typical* - typical of a situation in which workers are asked, with increasing rigidity, to accede completely to their employer's requests. The new legislation regarding immigrants has been an integral part of this growing casualization of labor, especially Law number 189/2002, the so-called "Bossi-Fini law", that subordinates the granting of a residence permit to the existence of a job contract at the very moment in which the "better" part of "new" contracts *are in fact temporary contracts*.

Quite a few of these "flexibility" measures were introduced through agreements between various Italian governments - both center-right and center-left - and the unions, but the *general trend* over the past twenty years has been one of *unilateral* decisions made by governments and entrepreneurs *without previous agreement* with the unions and, at times, without even having consulted them. Today, in the autumn of 2004, we have reached the most critical point to date in the relations between the government (the Berlusconi government, in this case) and the trade-union organizations.

It goes without saying that the metalworkers, too, have suffered the consequences of these neoliberal policies. Despite the fact that the metalworking sector vaunts the highest rate of unionization, the metalworkers too have been forced to retreat, losing some of the guarantees they conquered in the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions the Italian metalworkers' unions have demonstrated their capacity to fight back - at times together, at times not. In fact the demise of the FLM led to a wild see-sawing of reconciliation and separation between the FIOM on one side, and the FIM and UILM almost always in unison on the other. The moment of greatest discord among the three major metalworkers' unions was in the first years of this new century, beginning with the strikes for the national labor contract in 2001. On that occasion the FIOM vehemently affirmed the need of a substantial wage increase and a more democratic method of collecting the workers' "opinions," positions that isolated it from the other two unions. This "isolation" (which was not, however, an isolation from the mass of workers) was repeated in the following years when the FIOM organized a series of struggles within individual firms to obtain wage increases that had not been obtained with the national contract.

In addition to the issues of wages and greater democracy, the FIOM has also had the merit - in our view - of stressing the importance of the defense of the rights of immigrant workers. A FIOM document from 2004 states: "It is necessary to establish an equality of social conditions [of immigrant workers] with the native population, within the framework of the common struggle for the right to housing, to public education, to social services. The immigrant

metalworker is first of all a person blackmailed and subject to blackmail in the workplace and in society. And the blackmail that afflicts him weakens the bargaining power of all the workers. For this reason the struggle for the rights of immigrants is in the direct interest of all workers." But the FIOM too, like the FIM and the UILM, has been in difficulty in recent years, since the government and the entrepreneurs managed to *make common cause* against the workers' deepest aspirations, and against the union proposal for a course of development based on scientific research and technological innovation instead of the course pursued by Italian capitalism up to now, based on low wages and the maximum intensification of labor. This difficulty, which particularly concerns the FIOM, and the particular difficulty of the FIM and the UILM in even just *getting a hearing* from the current government, now appears to be favoring a reconciliation of the three unions that could have positive effects also for immigrant workers. It is too early to tell whether this reconciliation will last (the FIM's insistence on wage differentiation between the North and the South is one of the issues that may compromise it); just as it is too early to tell whether it will succeed in breathing fresh life into the struggle against racism and discrimination against immigrant workers. But both such possibilities do exist.

## SECTION 4

### RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA IN CASE STUDY

#### 1. Introduction

In the following pages we shall present the results of our empirical research on racial discrimination in the metalworking sector and on the role played by trade unions in this field.

As we shall see, in Italy racial discrimination in the labor market and in the workplace is quite a widespread phenomenon, and one which is generally underestimated. The Italian labor market is in fact a *racially hierarchized* structure within which, on the whole, immigrants live in worse conditions than native workers. They are employed for the most part in heavy, precarious and less-paid jobs; they are assigned to the lowest professional levels and have less vertical mobility than Italian workers. A great many immigrants - not only the *sans-papiers*, but also legally documented workers - are employed in undocumented jobs.

In metalworking factories too, immigrant workers are assigned the heaviest tasks and hours, they do the least-skilled jobs and have the least chance of career advancement. Within this general picture, the immigrants working in small or subcontracting firms are usually not unionized, and live in conditions that are even worse than those of immigrants employed in medium or large companies. The former, in fact, are even more subject to discrimination. Quite often, their work is undocumented and their wages lower than those of Italian workers; the wages they receive do not reflect the type of work they actually do and they are assigned to jobs that do not reflect their professional qualifications; their actual remuneration is often less than the payment declared; they often have formally part-time job contracts for effectively full-time jobs; they are rarely paid overtime or protected against injury.

Our empirical research has focused on the case of the Zanussi-Electrolux plant in Susegana (in the Veneto). Compared to the other large metalworking firms, which until now have been highly reluctant to hire immigrant workers, Zanussi is the exception. In its employment of immigrant labor this large firm is similar to the many small and medium firms in the sector, and

the relations at Zanussi between the unions and the immigrants is emblematic of the complex relations in Italy between these two subjects.

## **2. Social research on racial discrimination: Italy's delay**

In Italy racial discrimination in the workplace has only recently become an issue, both in terms of social research and of trade-union action. All in all, we are still in an exploratory phase. Academic debate has not yet produced a clear conceptual definition of the question, whose very existence has at times been denied. The fact is that quite a few scholars consider a subordinate and inferiorized position of immigrants in the labor market to be basically natural and normal; while many others are principally, if not exclusively, concerned with the role played by immigration in the national economy, limiting themselves to quantifying the presence of immigrants in the various production sectors and describing the modalities of their introduction into the labor market through "ethnic networks." Only now are some first questions being asked about the labor dimension of racial discrimination and its impact on these processes.<sup>20</sup>

Today, when the "second generation" of immigrants are about to enter the labor market, it is high time that the social sciences in Italy show real awareness of the fact of racial discrimination and define the categories by which it may be analyzed. This necessity is made all the more clear by studies such as this one, in which research groups from different European countries find themselves using different categories of analysis, which makes comparison of the results all the more difficult.

## **3. Institutional discrimination**

The juridical condition of immigrants is an argument of constant debate in the public forum and the political sphere. The current body of legislation is the result, first, of Law number 40/98 (called the "Turco-Napolitano law"), and second of Law number 189/2002 (called the "Bossi-

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<sup>20</sup> The first studies on the labor dimension of racial discrimination were done quite recently. See F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, *La discriminazione dei lavoratori immigrati nel mercato del lavoro in Italia*, research report, Geneva, 2003; IRES-CGIL, *Discriminazioni sui luoghi di lavoro. Il caso dei lavoratori migranti*, research report, Rome, 2003; Università di Venezia/Laboratorio Immigrazione, *The Labor Dimension of Racial Discrimination in Italy*, Venice, 2004, research report for COSPE/RAXEN Project, financed by the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia.

Fini law"). At present the "Testo Unico Immigrazione" is in force (Legislative Decree no. 286/98, henceforth referred to as "T.U."); this compendium of all the laws and regulations on immigration provides for a system of laws for immigrants that is substantially different from the body of laws and juridical protection enjoyed by natives.<sup>21</sup> Citizenship constitutes the extenuating circumstance with respect to the entitlement of the totality of guaranteed rights. As Ferrajoli puts it, citizenship is effectively the "ultimate privilege of status."<sup>22</sup>

Section 2 subsection 3 of the T.U., assimilating the ILO Convention no. 143 of 1975, establishes the principle of equality of treatment between immigrant and native workers. This means that no law may broach conditions that are more unfavorable to immigrant than to native workers. In practice, however, it is the T.U. itself that provides, in some cases, for differentiated treatment for the immigrant worker. The Bossi-Fini law, for example, as a prerequisite for the issuing of a residence permit for work purposes, introduced an entirely new institution, known as the "residence contract." This, in fact, is a normal job contract with the addition, however, of two clauses that oblige the employer to vouch for the immigrant worker's expenses for housing and possible repatriation (section 5-*bis*, T.U.). Such a contract serves to strengthen the bond between residence and work, to the detriment of immigrant workers. This institution is the emblem of the great rigidity of a system of immigration control based on the principle that *only* those who work can legally reside in Italy. It leads to a substantial inequality of treatment between workers: unlike the case of Italian workers, for immigrants work is not only a source of economic support but is also the essential prerequisite for their legal residence in the country.

Since in the current labor market casualty is, increasingly, the rule, the immigrant is compelled to live day by day with the risk of falling into "illegality." In fact the immigrant worker who loses his or her job can remain unemployed only for a period of up to six months, after which he or she is considered an "illegal" and can be expelled from the country. Some authors have called this type of legislation a veritable machine for the *production of "illegality,"* designed to enlarge the area of undocumented and irregular labor in order to reduce the overall costs of commodity production.

But the existence of a regular employment relationship is not only the necessary condition for residing in Italy: on the basis of the Bossi-Fini law, it is also the essential prerequisite for *entering* the country legally. The T.U. prescribes that a government decree shall indicate

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<sup>21</sup> See Bonetti, P., "I principi, i diritti e i doveri. Le politiche migratorie," in Nascimbene B. (ed.), *Diritto degli stranieri*, Padua: Cedam, 2004, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> See Ferrajoli, L., "Dai diritti del cittadino ai diritti della persona," in Zolo, D. (ed.), *La cittadinanza. Appartenenza, identità, diritti*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1994, p. 288.

annually the maximum quotas of immigrant workers to be admitted: no entry will be authorized unless the immigrant *already* has a contract with an employer. Yet it is clear as day that the vast majority of immigrant workers have entered the country *without* a job contract, and therefore illegally. The vast majority of immigrants have acquired their residence permits through *ex post* regularization; nearly 1,500,000 workers have regularized their administrative positions thanks to one of the five amnesties that have been decreed in Italy over the past 18 years.

In practice, then, also the annual decrees that set the maximum quotas of entries for work purposes are exploited for the regularization of immigrant workers who are already in the country. Entrepreneurs get around the provision by applying for authorization of entry from abroad for *sans-papiers* workers who are *already* in their employ, and who through this procedure can obtain their residence permits. This system strengthens the position of the employer who *in fact* becomes the sole proprietor of the immigrant worker's right of entry and residence. In the latest amnesty (2002), for example, only entrepreneurs who had an irregular immigrant in their employ could apply for the regularization of undocumented labor; this power guaranteed employers the possibility of autonomously laying down employment contract conditions.

With so much power concentrated in the hands of the entrepreneur it is not surprising that the *de facto* practice of regularization is completely different from that prescribed by the law, with employers freighting immigrant workers with the additional expenses they are supposed to be covering themselves. In the latest amnesty (begun in 2002, ended in 2004) employers were ordered to pay social security contributions for work already done. In the event, however, the threat of an employer's refusing to apply for the workers' regularization effectively blackmailed the immigrants into paying the contributions themselves. According to a recent study, this was the case with fully 98% of the immigrant workers who applied to the CGIL services in Milan for regularization counseling.<sup>23</sup> And the situation is no different for the regularly documented immigrant, who, as we have seen, constantly - structurally - runs the risk of falling into "illegality." For him, or for her, a dismissal, or even just the "normal" termination of a temporary employment relationship (and they are legion), greatly multiplies this risk.

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<sup>23</sup> See [www.stranieriinitalia.it/brigulio](http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/brigulio) (8/13/2004).

#### 4. Racial discrimination in the workplace

In Italy there have been very few studies on racial discrimination in the workplace, but the picture now emerging is generally negative.<sup>24</sup> It shows that immigrants are relegated to the most precarious and worst paying segments of the labor market; often have no social security or insurance coverage; are usually hired with temporary or employment agency contracts; receive wages that do not reflect the type of work they actually do and are assigned to jobs that do not reflect their professional qualifications; have less chance of career advancement and are more subject to occupational injuries than native workers.

When the first immigrant workers arrived in Italy in the mid-1970s they were employed for the most part in the "underground" agricultural economy and in private household services;<sup>25</sup> it was not until the early 1990s that they found large-scale employment in industry as well. Today these are still the principal economic sectors with the greatest number of immigrants. Their first jobs were and continue to be in the "underground" economy. This is due both to labor market pressure - where the demand for undocumented labor continues to rise - and to changes in work organization, as well as to migration policies.

The large number of immigrant workers in the "underground" economy has commonly - and erroneously - been accounted for by a "common interest" between immigrant workers (be they *sans-papiers* or regular), who have greater immediate benefits than in a documented job, and their employers, who are guaranteed a supply of low-cost labor.<sup>26</sup> In actual fact, this presumed "connivance" of the immigrant worker is the result of an *inescapable "choice"*: the immigrant is compelled by the normal *conditions of migration* to secure employment immediately in order to survive. Employers, for their part, are interested in the benefits produced by undocumented labor - especially that of immigrants without residence permits - in terms of a reduction of costs. A recent study, examining two Italian regions (Lazio and Campania), has shown that immigrant

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<sup>24</sup> See Università di Venezia/Laboratorio Immigrazione, *The Labor Dimension of Racial Discrimination in Italy*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> On this early period see Maciotti, M.I. and Pugliese, E., *Gli immigrati in Italia*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1991.

<sup>26</sup> See Zincone, G., *Secondo rapporto sull'integrazione degli immigrati in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001, p. 51.

workers employed legally are paid on average 24% more than *sans-papiers* workers in the case of men, and 19% more in the case of women.<sup>27</sup>

We wish to stress the fact that undocumented labor does not concern only *sans-papiers* workers but also workers with proper residence permits. In this regard Reyneri observes that: "indeed, depending on the year, between one third and one half [of the undocumented workers] have a residence permit for work purposes and could be employed legally. The number of immigrants illegally employed because they have no residence permit falls especially in the years immediately following regularization."<sup>28</sup> The high percentage of properly documented immigrants doing undocumented work is due in the first instance to spontaneous mechanisms of the market and to processes of casualization (which have great impact on Italian and European workers as well). We note that migration policies have done nothing but favor and administer this process.

As regards forms of employment, Italian scientific literature generally refers to the role played by processes of "specialization of migration flows" and by so-called "ethnic networks." Such literature is in the habit of speaking of a sort of "plastering" [immobilization] of the labor market, allegedly due to the "ethnicization" of certain professional figures<sup>29</sup> or to a blocking of the horizontal mobility of individual workers.<sup>30</sup> What is more, much of this literature explains the introduction of immigrants into the labor market on the basis of their cultural characteristics. These points of view are highly questionable because they assume that immigrant workers and their so-called "ethnic networks" have a power of control over the market - and over the labor market - which in fact they do not have. The introduction of immigrants of certain nationalities into certain segments of the labor market depends less on the strength of social networks than it does on spontaneous mechanisms of the market itself, which by its very nature selects, hierarchizes, restrains and "specializes." At most, immigrants can make every effort to assert themselves in a given production segment, but only after having been "destined" to that segment by the selective and coercive mechanisms of the market. In this sense it seems more correct to observe that "an example of segmentation is that process by which immigrant men - and women - end up finding employment in the area of care-giving services (...). In this case it is not a

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<sup>27</sup> Research study by Baldacci, Inglese and Strozza, cited in F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, *Le discriminazioni dei lavoratori immigrati nel mercato del lavoro in Italia*, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> See Reyneri, E., *Sociologia del mercato del lavoro*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002, p. 408.

<sup>29</sup> See Ambrosini, M., *Utiles invasori. L'inserimento degli immigrati nel mercato del lavoro italiano*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> See Zanfrini, L., "La discriminazione nel mercato del lavoro," in Fondazione Cariplo - ISMU, *Quinto rapporto sulle migrazioni*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999, p. 168.

question of accepting an unfavorable first job (...) that may eventually lead one up the employment ladder (...). Here, the immigrant men - and especially the women - may remain indefinitely in that first job."<sup>31</sup>

The Italian labor market presents itself as a system structured according to a *hierarchy of positions that is also racially defined*, within which immigrants can do *only* certain jobs. What jobs? The ones that the market is willing to "guarantee" them, and not, as public consensus would have it, the ones that Italian workers no longer want to do.

This brings us to the theme of discrimination in hiring practices. This question was the object of a recent study carried out in three Italian cities (Turin, Rome and Naples) that utilized the "Bovenkerk" method. The study set the rate of discrimination against immigrant workers at 41, substantially higher than the rate in other European countries (Table 1).<sup>32</sup>

The same theme was taken up in a study on the socio-economic integration of Maghrebian immigrants in the Veneto commissioned by the International Organization for Migration. This study reveals that while on one hand there has been a gradual process of social integration of these immigrants who have been living in the region for some twenty years, on the other there are widespread practices of discrimination against them. The Maghrebian workers are subject to discriminatory selection in the labor market, formally connected with the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and climate that is so widespread today in Italy and the rest of Europe; but in fact such discrimination is due just as much to the greater labor activism of these workers, who are among the most active in the unionization process. This activism is spurred for the most part by the processes of flexibilization of production, the intensification of work rhythms, the lengthening of working hours,<sup>33</sup> and the casualization of employment relationships. Now, the greater solidity of their socio-economic integration - resulting in less willingness to accept company demands - and their greater activism has rendered these Maghrebians "undesirable" in the eyes of many local entrepreneurs, who give preference to other nationalities, especially

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<sup>31</sup> See Maciotti, M.I. and Pugliese, E., *L'esperienza migratoria*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> See F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, *La discriminazione dei lavoratori immigrati nel mercato del lavoro in Italia*, op. cit. The study was carried out by comparing the results of job applications made by a pair of actors (one Italian, the other a Moroccan immigrant). Other studies have shown that there is greater discrimination in the hiring of Maghrebian workers than is the case with other immigrant populations. See Università di Venezia/Laboratorio Immigrazione, *Gli immigrati maghrebini in Veneto. Radicamento, precarizzazione, resistenza, selezione*, research report for the IOM, Venice, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> See Basso, P., *Tempi moderni, orari antichi. L'orario di lavoro a fine secolo*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1998; translated by G. Donis, *Modern Times, Ancient Hours. Working Lives in the Twenty-first Century*, London and New York: Verso, 2003.

those from eastern Europe, who have immigrated more recently, have less stability, and are less aware of their juridical and union safeguards. The study remarks on the "conflicting processes that involve the Maghrebian populations and the host society simultaneously, taking the form of pressure, counterpressure, resistance: on one hand, the pressure exerted by the immigrants bent on gradual integration, countered by the resistance of local society intent on pressing them back into social marginality; and on the other, the pressure of the economic system for casualization and total flexibility, which meets with strong resistance in the demands made by these immigrants."<sup>34</sup>

The labor market also shows great dynamism. Just as immigrants are admitted and expelled with great ease, so can certain nationalities find themselves "monopolizing" single segments of the market for a certain period, to then be excluded upon the arrival of new nationalities that, lacking resources, are compelled to sell their labor power at lower cost. In recent years we have witnessed a process by which the labor market compels immigrant populations to compete with one another, whereby time and again new populations - more precarious and subject to coercion - are set against populations of "old" immigration.

There are many cases in which entrepreneurs obtain an immediate economic advantage by paying immigrant workers less than they pay the Italians, or by paying newly-arrived immigrants less than they pay immigrant workers who have been living in Italy for a longer time. But, at times, the indirect advantage for companies is even greater: differentiation of contractual conditions or career possibilities produces elements of tension between workers that, as we shall see, may lead to a paralysis of union action.

Table 1 – Rate of discrimination in 5 countries of the European Union.

	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Holland</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Italy</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> phase: phone call	19	13	23	25	27
2 <sup>nd</sup> phase: job interview proposed	12	6	9	8	12
3 <sup>rd</sup> phase: job offer	2	Not made	5	3	2
<b>Total rate of discrimination</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>

Source: F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, 2003, op. cit.

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<sup>34</sup> See Università di Venezia/Laboratorio Immigrazione, *Gli immigrati maghrebini in Veneto*, op. cit., p. 46.

The question of wages is complex. Generally speaking we find no phenomenon of *direct* discrimination in immigrant wages: where the professional qualifications of immigrant and native workers are equal, generally wages are equal. Discrimination impacts on wages for the most part *indirectly*, through levels of qualification and career advancement.

ISTAT [the Central Statistics Office], which calculates the wages of immigrant workers annually and compares them with those of native workers, has registered quite significant wage differentials.<sup>35</sup> A recent study, which analyzed the daily wages of native and immigrant workers while taking into account the variables that can impact on wage difference, has revealed that "in 1991 the average daily wages of a foreign worker was 84% of the amount paid native workers. The differential was substantially the same in 1995 (85%), while there was a slight increase in 1993 (87%). Commerce is the sector with the greatest differential, while the construction industry has the lowest."<sup>36</sup>

At the moment of hiring, the qualification level of immigrant workers is generally very low, or at any rate lower than that of Italian workers. The following table shows that throughout the 1990s the percentage of immigrant workers who were unskilled was very high, even if it did fall by a few percentage points. This is even more significant if we consider the fact that immigrant workers have often had more formal schooling than Italian workers.

Table 2 – Immigrant workers subdivided by qualification, 1991-1999 (percentages).

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Unskilled worker	81.0	79.2	76.7	76.9	75.8	74.5	75.4	77.5	77.3
Skilled worker	15.7	17.3	19.2	19.7	19.8	19.8	19.4	17.9	17.9
Specialized worker	1.8	1.7	2.3	2.0	3.1	4.0	3.7	2.9	2.7
Clerk	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.7	1.4	1.8	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source, F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, 2003, op. cit.

Monitoring the vertical mobility of immigrant workers is more complicated. Nonetheless a number of studies have shown how difficult it is for them to progress to a higher level of

<sup>35</sup> See F.i.e.r.i. - ILO, *La discriminazione dei lavoratori immigrati nel mercato del lavoro in Italia*, op. cit., p. 33. These figures, however, do not take into account important variables such as length of service and qualification.

<sup>36</sup> See Villosio, C., "I lavoratori stranieri," in Contini, B. (ed.), *Osservatorio sulla mobilità del lavoro in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002, p. 250. The study was based on data furnished by INPS [the National Social Security Institute].

qualification. One recent study, for example, which has analyzed the career advancement of 1,605 immigrant workers in the province of Reggio Emilia (in the Emilia-Romagna region), reveals that nearly 54% of the workers with more than 10 years of service with a firm have made no advance in professional qualification.<sup>37</sup>

Table 3 – Immigrant workers by advance in qualification and length of service.

		Length of service										Total	
		Less than 1 year		From 1 to 3 years		From 3 to 6 years		From 6 to 10 years		More than 10 years		no.	%
		no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%		
Advance	No	403	96.2	475	79.3	219	65.0	113	61.1	35	<b>53.8</b>	1245	<b>77.6</b>
Qualification	Yes	16	3.8	124	20.7	118	35.0	72	38.9	30	46.2	360	22.4
Total		419	100.0	599	100.0	337	100.0	185	100.0	65	100.0	1605	100.0

Source: Mottura, G., 2003, op. cit.

A national study by IRES-CGIL, which interviewed 354 immigrants who are union delegates, registers a less negative figure: "only" 25.9% of the interviewees with more than 5 years service have had no improvement in their level of qualification. We need to emphasize, however, that the study took into consideration only workplaces that were unionized, in which immigrant workers find less unfavorable conditions.

Table 4 – Immigrant workers subdivided by advance in qualification and length of service (%).

		Length of service				Total
		Less than 1 year	From 1 to 3 years	From 3 to 5 years	More than 5 years	
Advance	No	92.3	74.5	50.0	25.9	65.0
Qualification	Yes	7.7	25.5	50.0	74.1	35.0

Source: IRES-CGIL, *Discriminazioni sui luoghi di lavoro*, 2003, op. cit.

A very useful indicator for understanding the level of discrimination against immigrant workers is that of occupational injuries. Recent studies reveal that immigrant workers are subject to a far higher rate of industrial accidents than Italians. In general this is due to their weak working condition - despite the structural character of the presence of immigrant labor power in the

<sup>37</sup> See Mottura, G., *Non solo braccia. Condizioni di lavoro e percorsi d'inserimento sociale degli immigrati in un'area ad economia diffusa*, research report, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, 2003.

Italian economic system - and in particular to their strong concentration in sectors and jobs with high risk of accident. In this sense, the high incidence of accidents among immigrant workers represents an important indicator of the *special* precariousness not only of their working, but, indeed, of their overall social condition.

The first national study on this issue, done by the Caritas and the Institute of Social Medicine, showed, for the year 2001, a 9.1% incidence of industrial accidents for immigrant workers, against 4.2% for Italians.<sup>38</sup> A more circumscribed study still in progress, carried out by the Department of Industrial Medicine of the Higher Institute for Prevention and Safety in the Workplace, focusing on the working conditions and risk of professional injury of female immigrant domestic workers, has yielded very similar results.<sup>39</sup> Getting back to the national study, it also presented the following findings: since 1998 the professional injury rate of immigrants has outstripped their rate of employment; deaths from industrial accidents have increased and their incidence in the general total has risen; given the same jobs, immigrant workers have a higher rate of industrial accidents than Italians.

Within this disadvantageous situation we find a further element of discrimination, since it turns out that immigrant workers receive less compensation than Italian workers do. In short, we find - on average - reduced recognition of the seriousness of the injury, less medico-legal protection, and a propensity for temporary rather than permanent compensation.

Furthermore, the issue of the quantification of the injuries is even more serious for immigrant workers than it is for the Italians, because for the immigrants fear of losing their jobs and such grave problems as the lack of residence permits dissuade them from reporting their injuries.

In light of this particularly negative situation, some preventive measures have been taken, however late they may be. They are local and nonsystematic initiatives, undertaken by entrepreneurial associations or by the unions in association with public institutions, whose essential aim is to awaken and to instruct; as, for example, with the publication of multilingual guides and pamphlets on regulations for the prevention of industrial accidents, or on-the-job safety training courses.

In conclusion, in light of the literature and of the studies done thus far it is possible to affirm that in Italy the introduction of immigrants into the labor market has generally come about according to rules and modalities that contain various elements of discrimination. Furthermore,

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<sup>38</sup> See Pittau, F. and Spagnolo, A. (eds.), *Immigrati e rischio infortunistico in Italia*, Rome: IMS, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> See Oddi, M. and Signorini, S., "Da una ricerca Ispesl molte conferme. E qualche sorpresa," 2087, VI, no. 5, (2004), p. 19.

it should be noted that the labor dimension of racial discrimination takes different shapes which combine with the other dimensions (school, housing, etc.) of discrimination to which immigrants are subject, and that it is characterized by systematicity and structurality.

## **5. Trade unions and immigrant workers in Italy**

To understand trade-union policies for combating discrimination we have to begin with an analysis of the ways in which immigrant workers have entered the unions and with the recent history of trade-union organization in Italy. It is clear that the themes are connected: the union's capacity to enact antiracist policies is directly proportional to its capacity to integrate immigrant workers, embracing their demands for emancipation; and, at the same time, it is connected with the type of relationship the union entertains with the political and institutional sphere.

It is important to note that today trade unions represent "the institutional structures of Italian society to which the immigrant populations voluntarily turn most frequently. The union presents itself to immigrants as the place that is most open - or, if you will, least closed, for it comes in for no little criticism - to their needs, expectations and demands."<sup>40</sup> The entry of immigrant workers into the union has been gradual, but very substantial; this, however, has not always been matched by a full recognition of their presence by union leaders and in the determination of union policies and plans of action.

On the whole the immigrants' rate of unionization is higher than that of Italians,<sup>41</sup> but this has not been matched by a proportionate number of immigrants with positions of responsibility in the union. Yes, there has been a rise in the number of immigrant union delegates in the factories and we find the first cases of union officials or secretaries who are immigrants, but they are still few in number if we consider the number of non-Italians who are union members.

The presence of immigrants in the union has evolved over time, increasingly spurred on by the immigrant workers themselves. We can distinguish between "two different phases in the evolution of these relations, with the second half of the 1990s as the watershed. In the first phase the function performed by trade unions - often as surrogates for other public institutions -

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<sup>40</sup> See Basso, P., "Sul rapporto tra immigrati e sindacati," in Mauri, L. and Visconti, L. M. (eds.), *Diversity management e società multiculturale*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2004, p. 113. The position of union representative is one of the very few "institutional" roles the immigrant citizen can fill in Italy.

<sup>41</sup> Mottura terms their rate of unionization "most substantial, slightly less than 45%." See Mottura, G., "Elementi di scenario: dati e tendenze," in Leonardi, S. and Mottura, G. (eds.), *Immigrazione e sindacato. Lavoro, rappresentanza, contrattazione*, Rome: Ediesse, 2003, p. 37.

was prevalently (albeit not exclusively) that of providing assistance and support services (in a broad sense, and with no negative connotation intended) to immigrants *as immigrants*. In the second phase, in addition to the earlier activities, which by no means have been abandoned, we witness a beginning (no more than a beginning) of union activity in the proper sense, concerned with protecting the rights of immigrants *as workers*.<sup>42</sup>

The organization of immigrant representation has taken *a dual form* in the union confederations.<sup>43</sup> In the CGIL, “special” offices were created (termed “Immigrants’ Offices”), which are principally concerned with legal counseling and assistance in the processing of residency petitions; then, it is the federations of each sector that are responsible for negotiations concerning the specific needs of immigrant workers, a task more typical of the union as such. As we shall see in the following pages, the interviews done by our research group have shown that this model of organization is limited in several ways: in particular, it produces a certain cleavage between the different moments of contact between immigrant workers and unions. It is more or less implicitly assumed that the condition of juridico-administrative precariousness and questions of employment relationships have to be confined to separate dimensions when, in fact, they are closely linked. The result is that, in many cases, union representatives in the sectors know nothing about the questions concerning the administrative condition of immigrant workers.

The “model” we have just described is similar to the one adopted by the CISL, with the important difference that the CISL, in 1991, created an assistance association known as ANOLF, composed of immigrants and Italians together, whose specific task has been to help immigrants work out their juridico-administrative problems. In this case our interviews show that the existence of an association outside the union heightens the risk of estranging immigration issues from the union’s everyday activity, even if this solution has proved more successful in the areas of community relations and fund raising (the latter, in particular, is a problem that afflicts the CGIL organizations).

In the presentation of our empirical research that follows, we shall analyze situations of discrimination against immigrant workers in the metalworking sector and observe how trade unions deal with such situations.

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<sup>42</sup> See Basso, P., “Sul rapporto tra immigrati e sindacati,” *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> See Mottura, G., “Immigrati e sindacato,” in Pugliese, E. (ed.), *Rapporto immigrazione. Lavoro, sindacato, società*, Rome: Ediesse, 2000, p. 122.

## 6. Trade unions and racial discrimination in the metalworking industry: results of the empirical research

The presence of immigrant workers in the industrial sector is a relatively recent phenomenon, but one that is sharply and constantly on the rise. Industry, more than any other sector, has called out for an increase in the entry quota for immigrants; and metalworking is the industrial division with the most immigrant workers. As the following table shows, the metalworking industries register a sharp rise in the number of immigrant workers, compared with a hiring/termination balance that is negative for the Italians.<sup>44</sup>

This *Dossier Statistico* survey carried out by Caritas estimated that in 2002 the percentage of immigrants hired in the metalworking industry was 17% of the total number of hirings, while in mechanical engineering it was 11.6%.<sup>45</sup> The presence of immigrant workers in the metalworking industry has thus become a structural phenomenon.

Nonetheless, in this industry too immigrant workers fill the lowest positions and do the heaviest work. They are employed prevalently in the foundries and in the painting and chroming departments.

Table 5 – Balance (hirings/terminations) for Italian and immigrant workers subdivided by sector (2002).

Sector	Italian worker balance	Immigrant worker balance
Textile industry	21,739	945
Tanning industry	-6,673	320
Petroleum industry	-182	23
Metalworking industry	-4,252	3,107
Mechanical engineering	-2,599	1,579
Electrical engineering	-5,097	887

Source: Caritas, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2003*, op. cit.

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<sup>44</sup> In interpreting these figures, however, we need to take into account the fact that a greater number and percentage of immigrant workers hold temporary employment contracts.

<sup>45</sup> See Caritas, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2003*, Rome: Anterem, 2003, p. 267. These are not the highest percentages, which in fact are to be found in the textile industry (17.7%) and the tanning industry (22.8%).

## 6.1 Methodological note

In the analysis of sector A our English, Belgian and French partners have focused on urban public transportation (while the Bulgarian team examined the construction sector); our Italian team focused instead on the metalworking sector because in Italy at present there are very few immigrants employed in urban public transportation. The case study within the metalworking sector regarded Electrolux-Zanussi in Susegana (in the province of Treviso).<sup>46</sup> The other partners have made the sector study coincide with the case study; our study, by contrast, has not been limited to Zanussi and the Veneto context but has been expanded to include other forms. This is because, in Italy, the metalworking sector has come to be characterized by a preponderance of small and medium firms and is present throughout the country, although most particularly in the North. For these reasons a considerable number of interviews are with workers and delegates from other metalworking firms or with local trade-union representatives who operate in provinces different from that of Zanussi.

In all, we did 4 interviews with national trade-union officers; 9 interviews with local or provincial trade-union officers; 5 interviews with immigrant workers; 1 (double) interview with Italian workers; 2 interviews with members of associations and NGOs. For the Zanussi case study we did 10 interviews (divided between workers and union representatives). The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with the traditional method of text analysis.

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<sup>46</sup> The attempt to analyze the level of discrimination in a firm presents a number of problems, particularly connected with finding data on the number and qualifications of immigrant workers. The firm does not provide this type of information, which means that the analysis can be carried out exclusively on the basis of elements provided by the interviewees.

Table of interviews for the study on discrimination in the metalworking sector

No.	Union/Firm/Association	Profession/Role	Type of Interview	Nationality
4001AM	ANOLF-CISL	National President	1	Italian
4002AM	FIOM-CGIL	Union official – National Secretary	1	Italian
4003AM	CGIL	Union official– National Secretary	1	Italian
4004AM	FIOM-CGIL	Union official – Provincial Secretary (Brescia)	1	Italian
4005AM	FIOM-CGIL	Union official – Provincial Secretary (Padua)	2	Italian
4006AM	FIOM-CGIL	Union official - Provincial Secretary (Vicenza)	2	Italian
4007AM	FIM-CISL	Union official - Provincial Secretary (Padua)	2	Italian
4008AM	FIM-CISL	Union official - Provincial Secretary (Vicenza)	2	Italian
4009AM	CGIL	Union official – in charge of Immigrants' Office Province of Venice	2	Moroccan
4010AM	FIM-CISL	Union official - Provincial Secretary (Treviso)	2	Italian
4011AM	CISL	Union official - Provincial Secretary (Treviso)	2	Italian
4012WM	Zanussi	Factory worker (f)- RSU FIM	3	Italian
4013AM	Industrie SEV	Factory worker (m) - RSU FIOM	3	Italian
4014AM	CGIL	Union official – FILLEA Local Secretary	1	Italian
4015AM	CGIL	Union official – in charge of Immigrants' Office Conegliano Veneto (Treviso)	2	Italian
4016AM	FIOM-CGIL	Union official – Provincial Secretary (Treviso)	2	Italian
4017AM	CGIL	Union official - in charge of Immigrants' Office Province of Treviso	2	Italian
4018AM	Baxi (Bassano, Vi)	Factory worker (m) - RSU FIM	3	Moroccan
4019AM	Fonderie ZEN (Padua)	Factory worker (m) - RSU FIM	3	Rumanian
4020AM	Fonderie Anselmi (Padua)	Factory worker (m)	3	Senegalese
4021AM	G. R. Luce (Venice)	Factory worker (m)	3	Egyptian
4022AM	Immigrants' Committee (Brescia)	Factory worker (m)– employed in CGIL Immigrants' Office	4	Moroccan
4023WM	Associazione Razzismo Stop (Padua)	Graphic designer - Volunteer	4	Italian
4024AM	Baxi (Bassano, Vi)	Factory worker (m)	3	Ghanaian
4025WM	Zanussi	Factory worker (f) - RSU FIOM	3	Italian
4026AM	Zanussi	Former factory worker (m)	3	Italian
4027WM	Zanussi	Factory worker (f) – RSU UILM	3	Italian
4028WM	Zanussi	Factory worker (f) - RSU UILM	3	Chinese
4029AM	Zanussi	Factory worker (m) - RSU FIM	3	Bengali
4030AM	Zanussi	Factory worker (m) - RSU FIM	3	Bengalese
4031WM	Zanussi	Factory worker (f)	3	Moroccan

## 6.2 Dimensions of discrimination in the metalworking sector

Our study has revealed a complex and widespread system of discrimination, present on two levels: on one hand we have the area of the "underground" economy, of subcontracting (and subcontracting of subcontracting) firms, of workshops and cooperatives, where the trade union is all but absent and immigrant workers are subject to particularly negative treatment (worse than the native workers, in any case); on the other, the area of medium to large firms, where treatment generally does not violate contractual regulations, but there is still a form of discrimination in job functions, in professional qualification (immigrant workers are usually placed at the bottom of the ladder), and in the possibilities of career advancement. And it must also be said that there are still some factories - especially among the largest ones - that refuse to hire immigrants, even if this phenomenon is slowly diminishing.

The differentiated condition of the immigrant worker in small firms and, more generally, in firms that are not unionized, is an element emphasized by all the interviewees, regardless of their trade union affiliation.

*"Here we have to distinguish between the large, the small and the very small firm, in the sense that in the large firm the immigrant receives substantially the same treatment as all the other workers (...). Then, if we go on to the small firm, there it's a little different, because the small firm utilizes non-E.U. workers to have a reduction of costs" (4010AM).*

*"Among other things it's difficult to keep an eye on these aspects because not all firms are unionized, and what's more there are firms that subcontract and it's especially the subcontractors one ought to keep an eye on, but they are the ones where there is no union" (4011AM).*

The situation is more complex in workplaces where the union is present. Discriminatory practices are less direct and the immigrants are on a more equal footing with the Italian workers, even though they are hired for lower-level jobs and assigned to the most onerous tasks.

*"It is a delicate question, because since [the immigrant workers] do jobs that are marginal, it's natural that they find themselves in a marginal position also where wages are concerned. It's not so much in terms of wage discrimination against foreign workers compared to Italian*

*workers that the question has to be posed, but rather in the fact that they do the lowest-paying jobs" (4011AM).*

*"Where you've got the union, the solution you find is that, in compliance with the laws of the contract, [firms] hire the immigrants at the lowest levels, but they are given their due; where there's no union, we have seen that if the entrepreneurs can give themselves discounts on the terms of the contract, they won't apply the table of wages correctly" (4008AM).*

As far as vertical mobility is concerned, the interviewees emphasize how difficult it is for immigrants to advance to a higher contractual level. This situation leads directly to the problem of the conflict between immigrant and native workers, induced and fueled by the discriminatory position taken up by many firms.

Question: *"Is there discrimination where promotion is concerned?"*

Answer: *"Yes, there is. Here too, in non-unionized firms [immigrant workers] are in the firm's power because it's the firm that decides on promotion, and the immigrant's only chance of moving up the ladder depends on how much the company needs their professional contribution (4008AM).*

This issue regards all immigrant workers without distinction. We do not find differentiated treatment with regard to one or more specific populations.

Another significant element is the comparison - made frequently in the interviews - between the condition of female workers [in general] and that of immigrants. The forms of discrimination to which these two "social figures" are subject are held to be comparable.

*"In all the other situations, where we are not present and organized and where there's no company agreement, there's only the national contract, the pay is not lower than in the companies where we are present; there is much more pay differentiation because we find the migrants, the women and the youngest workers with the contractually minimum wage and we find the native workers, males with a certain educational qualification or with professional experience, with individual remuneration individually agreed upon with the firm that I'd say is even higher or at least similar to the firms where we are present" (4006AM).*

On the whole, the picture presented by the interviewees corresponds, in general, to the overall situation of immigrant labor, and no particular specificities of the sector emerge. What does clearly emerge, however, is the role played by trade unions in combating the most openly discriminatory practices, *when* the union is present in the firm. In this respect *the presence of the union is an important variable*, because when it is present in a firm "at least" the most grievous forms of discrimination find no place.

### **6.3 Trade unions and racial discrimination**

The findings that have emerged from our research show the unions often following different and diverging paths where discrimination is concerned: important cases of combating discrimination on one hand, and cases in which the union had difficulties in dealing with the phenomenon on the other. All in all, in trade unions the "discrimination" theme has not yet been adequately brought into focus. There are some first attempts that are still centered on gaining awareness and knowledge of the phenomenon, rather than on implementing organic policies to combat it; these first approaches have only been partially reflected in local union activity.

In general the juridical principle of equality of treatment is deemed by trade-union leaders to be a legal instrument that is sufficient to stem discrimination in the workplace. The union's delay in tackling the problem of racial discrimination appears as the symptom of a broader difficulty in coming to grips with firms that, in many cases, discriminate against immigrants in order to generate conflict between workers, implicitly - and at times explicitly - making "Italy first" into the regulative principle of labor negotiation and company management.

Finally, the union shows itself to be stronger and more capable of tackling discrimination the more successful it is in embracing the demands of immigrant workers and making them their own. But here it is confronted with pressures that are polar opposites: on one hand, the pressure to constitute a racially hierarchized labor market; on the other, the immigrant workers' expectations and demands for safeguards. As we shall see, faced with these opposing pressures the union's response is, at times, ambiguous.

In advanced capitalist countries the relation between trade unions and immigrant workers has been marked by complex dynamics. Trade unions, through policies that have not always been consistent, have attempted to strike a balance between the necessities of national economic

development, the demands of immigrant workers, and the "protectionist" demands of a part of native workers.

With regard to the entry of immigrant workers in the Italian labor market, trade unions have basically adopted two policy measures: "The first consists in adopting a strategy, so to speak, of prevention, making every effort to forestall any initiative - public, of private sectors of the economy, of particular firms or divisions - that may significantly augment the supply of labor power on the national market. The second consists in fighting to obtain immediate guarantees of equal treatment for new arrivals as far as wages and conditions of labor recruitment are concerned."<sup>47</sup>

These two policies have often co-existed within the union. If, on the one hand, trade unions have accepted the entry of immigrant labor, on the other they have not always fought for full worker equality. In this respect, the French case is analogous: "After long debate, the trade-union confederations have taken a double position: on the one hand, demanding equal rights, and thus opposing employers when they overexploit immigrants, depresses wages and divides the workers; on the other, embracing the necessity of state control of immigration and a strong tendency to protectionism on the labor market, especially in case of recession. Presented as the concerted defense of the interests of the class and of the nation, this double position, while it may be favorable to the integration of immigrants, especially through their incorporation in the labor movement, shows no lack of ambiguity."<sup>48</sup>

This *ambiguity* emerges especially when the union has to deal with the demands for recognition and social mobility put forward by immigrant workers - demands that call into question the principle of "Italy first." Mottura emphasizes: "As the permanent and definitive character of the presence of immigrant workers becomes increasingly clear, also in the specific field of action of the union the demand for equality of treatment is now being superimposed by a new demand that substantially exceeds its limits, both from the standpoint of contents and in the breadth and composition of the social sectors that give rise to it: the demand (...) for equal opportunity. As things stand now (...) many trade-union organizations seem to find it particularly difficult to incorporate this theme in their scheme of demands."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Mottura, G. and Pinto, P., *Immigrazione e cambiamento sociale. Strategie sindacali e lavoro straniero in Italia*, Rome: Ediesse, 1996, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> See De Rudder, V., Poiret, C. and Vourc'h, F., *L'inégalité raciste. L'universalité républicaine à l'épreuve*, Paris: Puf, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>49</sup> See Mottura, G. and Pinto, P., *Immigrazione e cambiamento sociale*, op. cit., p. 48.

If it is certainly true, for example, that in Italy too immigrants enjoy the *right* to equality of treatment, it is not equally true that they *concretely* enjoy the same possibilities as Italian workers. The juridical principle of equality of treatment is not sufficient to combat the racial hierarchization of the labor market and discrimination based on race; there is no use making formal reference to equal conditions for equal roles when in reality the initial conditions and the roles are and remain unequal.

#### **6.4 Metalworkers' unions and immigrant workers**

The Italian metalworkers' unions make no provision for a particular form of representation for immigrant workers: for the specific problems of immigrants the unions generally rely on confederation structures or, in the case of the CISL, on the ANOLF.

Our interviews have revealed quite different approaches even within the same trade unions, a sign of the lack of precise directives and of great freedom of action on the local level. In the majority of cases trade-union action regarding immigrants is principally concerned with the problems immigrants have *outside* the workplace (residence permits, family reunification, housing, etc.), and for this reason unitary action by the confederation, not the sectors, is deemed most useful. The answer of a FIOM union official is illustrative in this regard:

*"What more ought the FIOM to do? In my opinion, we are not yet capable of expressing precise policies within the sector (...). The main problems of migrants are not connected with the sectors. They are problems that regard workers of different sectors"* (4006AM).

Within the individual sectors we do begin to see some immigrant workers elected as delegates: such cases, while indeed positive, are sporadic. As far as the presence of immigrant workers in official positions is concerned, we find a situation quite similar to that of the union confederations: there have been cases of immigrant delegates in the factories and a few, episodic cases of union officials in the individual sectors, but the interviewees emphasize that on the whole the phenomenon is yet quite rare.

Question: *"At the national level are there immigrant representatives?"*

Answer: *"Few, and I do mean few. In the FIOM on the national level, no."*

Question: *"At the local level how many immigrant worker representatives are there?"*

Answer: *"Few. There are a few. Few especially in proportion to the number [of immigrant workers] there are now"* (4002AM).

*"If we're talking about full-time union officials, we still haven't got anyone; someone doing an internship, some boy (...) In the RSUs [union organizations in the workplace] they are still very few: the proportion of immigrants in all the RSUs present isn't more than 5%. Very few."* (4010AM).

Some also speak of the difficulties of the union in accepting the very presence of immigrant workers, especially in its governing bodies.

*"There are lots of explanations. Even though the union, from an ideological, political, standpoint has a positive attitude to the immigration phenomenon, then, from a standpoint of the presence of immigrants in its own governing bodies, there is still a certain reluctance"* (4006AM).

An innovative decision, whose results will be seen in the near future, was made recently at the national congress of the FIOM held in 2004: the metalworkers' union of the CGIL decided to broach the principle of proportional quotas in its governing bodies *in favor of immigrant workers*. How this policy will be concretely implemented is not yet known, also because the union itself has never monitored the number of its members with non-Italian citizenship; it should be emphasized, in any case, that this proposal by the FIOM national secretary did not give rise to polemics in trade-union spheres.

As regards the metalworkers' national contract, which was signed only by the FIM and the UILM, the sole specific element regarding immigrant workers is a joint declaration by labor and management by which firms commit themselves to "considering with the greatest attention" the possibility of favoring the temporary return of immigrant workers to their home countries through the unification of vacations with leaves not taken.<sup>50</sup> The FIOM platform of demands, by contrast, in addition to the unification of vacations, also made provision for the following points: the recognition of leaves of absence for dealing with administrative procedures connected with residence permits; the creation of company canteens that "respect the ethical and religious principles of the immigrants"; the creation of "a company information system in the

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<sup>50</sup> See [www.uil.it/uilm](http://www.uil.it/uilm) (8-27-04).

immigrants' mother tongue with the translation of the contract, the company regulations and provisions, and the regulations regarding occupational injury"; help in learning the Italian language "also with suitable training courses or facilitating participation in them."<sup>51</sup>

## 6.5 Trade unions and racism

In Italy the trade unions have always been opposed to racism in principle. Antiracism is a consolidated principle in the trade-union movement, which existed before the advent of foreign immigration. Nevertheless, the presence of immigrants has brought to light some difficulties in applying this principle in everyday practice, and this has generated a number of contradictions.

While the public trade-union position is a clear condemnation of racism, this does not mean that there is no racism in the unions. Racism is in fact a widespread phenomenon among the workers themselves, be they unionized or not: interiorizing the views that prevail in society at large, no small number of workers adhere to racist conceptualizations and representations that inferiorize immigrant populations. We even find racism among union officials themselves, especially in its "culturalist" guise.

Racism is a social phenomenon that is structurally present and rooted in the current composition of society, and workers are not immune to it. In this respect the trade union, with its presence or its absence, can play a fundamental role in combating or in promoting racism and discrimination. In Italy today, solidarity in the workplace between co-workers of different origin proceeds with great difficulty and diffidence; but it is also true that, to date, the workplace represents one of the few places of (at least potential) socialization between equals and, thus, of a possible fraternal meeting of peoples.

For the union, then, opposing racism means playing a dual role in combating it: on the outside, with regard to the market and institutions that practice discrimination and exploitation; on the inside, with regard to the division among workers produced by prevailing policies and opinions.

There are a number of factors that make the trade union a privileged subject in the fight against racism. The union, in fact, is intimately and intensely affected by the expectations and emancipative demands of immigrant workers, who attempt to orient it in the direction of more inclusive and egalitarian policies. Concretely speaking, however, trade unions have been somewhat slow in fully coming to grips with this thorny question: *no* union, for example, has

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<sup>51</sup> See [www.fiom.cgil.it](http://www.fiom.cgil.it) (8-27-04).

implemented awareness campaigns on racism directed at its own members. Both at the national and the local level, unions have provided their members with very little information on the subject;<sup>52</sup> in trade-union action the theme has not yet gained the central position it deserves, especially in virtue of the far from positive situation we find in Italy today.<sup>53</sup>

Question: *"Are union officials encouraged to get involved in these [antiracist] campaigns?"*

Answer: *"Yes, but with a certain resistance."*

Question: *"What do you mean?"*

Answer: *"Because ... because it's not a question that our members, militants-members, consider a priority. One does so many different things" (4002AM).*

As regards the presence of racism in the union, conflicting elements emerge from the interviews. Quite a few of the interviewees make a distinction - ambiguously at times - between the trade union as an organization, allegedly limp in its antiracism, and the mass of workers, who are not immune to the racism that prevails in society. This interpretation often serves to justify the union's lack of policies for combating racism.

*"A blunt judgment is that the union is ahead of its members. The union is a subject; it represents, promotes and safeguards the interests of workers, but it is a subject in itself. (...) On other themes - and in my view on the immigration theme it's so - in these areas the union is way ahead; it expresses a political culture and a social culture that impact with the black-green cultural substrate [of the anti-immigration Northern League] that exists in this area" (4006AM).*

The unions' responsibilities emerge more clearly when union officials, in moments of self-criticism, note the negative effects that certain ambiguous positions may produce. To avoid conflicts and reassure the Italian workers, at times trade unions have themselves been guilty of corroborating the common representations that see immigrants playing a replacement and temporary role, and guilty of confirming the principle of "Italy first."

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<sup>52</sup> One of the few examples of such information is a booklet published by the ANOLF: *Tutti hanno gli occhi orizzontali e il naso verticale. Guida contro il razzismo nei luoghi di lavoro*, ANOLF - ERMI, undated.

<sup>53</sup> In this regard see Università di Venezia/Laboratorio Immigrazione, *The Labor Dimension of Racial Discrimination in Italy*, op. cit.

*"There are delays and responsibilities that can be clearly individuated. It's not the responsibility of others. For myself, I speak for myself without judging others, there's a level of opportunism. The fear of having to come into conflict with one's own members who may well be in the majority prevailed over favoring the concept of equity and justice. And this, this is opportunism"* (4004AM).

Question: *"What is the basis of the conflict in the factory between immigrant workers and native workers?"*

Answer: *"It's this sense, which we inevitably transmit, that socially they are stopgaps. It's not a pretty thing to say, but that's how it is"* (4008AM).

Then, there are quite a few cases in which racism is concealed or completely evaded, as when it is asserted in abstractly categorical (and contradictory) terms that "on principle" it cannot be present in a trade union.

*"Racism is incompatible with trade-union activity within the CISL. A racist, when he [or she] adopts racist behavior or takes racist positions, immediately places himself outside the union. It is another matter if someone is racist, but does not perform actions or says things that produce evidence of his being racist"* (4001AM).

As regards action to combat racism within the union, the interviewees agree that the union must take cultural action that preserves contact with its base, and they stress the importance of unity among all workers.

*"The first job to be done is to recommence and continue all the more to be a community that educates, which is one of the historical tasks of a trade union"* (4008AM).

*"There is no alternative to debate. Either the union is capable of winning this battle that in my view is most of all cultural, of values, or we won't make it. In the assemblies we've engaged in debates, even bitter ones, with the workers. But it's a cultural battle that also helps something else, because behind these divisions that are present in the factories there's also the possibility for the entrepreneurs to obtain their own objective, which is the division of the workers"* (4004AM).

The limit of trade-union action is represented by a vision of racism as a cultural and popular phenomenon to be combated with cultural policies and programs, when instead it might be combated by calling into question the market and institutional mechanisms that produce inequality between native and immigrant workers. Many union leaders, too, seem to accept the idea that racism comes more "from below" than "from above."

## **6.6 Policies for combating discrimination**

As we have seen, Italian trade unions have been slow in coming to grips with the phenomenon of racial discrimination against immigrant workers. Our research highlights the difficulties of union officials in bringing the question into focus and thus, consequently, in developing efficient measures to deal with it. In many cases we have found no awareness of just how widespread the phenomenon is. This takes us back to the more general problem, which has also clearly emerged in our research: for trade unions, coming to grips with this issue means calling into question the principle of "Italy first" and thus coming into conflict with certain expectations of native workers. But calling this principle into question means also, and above all, attacking the "principle" of the racial hierarchization of the labor market and therefore clashing with the entrepreneurs - something trade unions are not always willing to do, especially when urgent issues of development and employment are at stake.

As was the case with the CGIL study on discrimination,<sup>54</sup> our own research reveals a significant difference of opinion between Italians and non-Italians, union officials and workers, with regard to the level of discrimination against immigrant workers.

We found that many of the union officials interviewed have insufficient knowledge of the phenomenon. Their continual recourse to "hearsay" and to trite judgments is indicative in this respect. What is more, they reveal a certain difficulty in conceptually stating what

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<sup>54</sup> In the course of their survey the CGIL researchers interviewed both immigrant and Italian delegates, distributing a questionnaire asking them for their judgment on the level of discrimination against immigrant workers. A significant difference of opinion emerged between the two categories of interviewees: for example, only 10.3% of the Italian delegates, compared to 37.7% of the immigrants, believe that immigrant workers are subject to discrimination in the recognition of their professional qualifications. See IRES-CGIL, *Discriminazioni sui luoghi di lavoro*, op. cit., p. 33.

"discrimination" is. There is not even a commonly shared definition of the term, and many of them do not know the legal regulations to combat racial discrimination now in force.

At the same time, they have difficulties in overcoming the concept of a minimum standard of equality of treatment and see no possibility of a different course of action.

*"Discrimination in Italy is not possible since the law guarantees equality of treatment between Italian and immigrant workers" (4001AM).*

*"The only initiatives we've taken are comparable to the ones for an Italian worker, they regard disciplinary measures, defense [of immigrant workers] if they're not paid what they're owed.... The only thing we did was the initiative on the provincial level, to avoid that these people should have to stand on line for hours and hours in front of police headquarters to get a residence permit" (4008AM).*

The trade unions' general difficulties in stemming management pressure to cut the rights and price of labor make a policy that privileges the position of native workers acceptable in some cases. Obviously the question cannot be generalized, since there are cases of good practices in which trade-union action has truly moved in the direction of equality of rights for all workers; but the general trend has been to implement conventional bargaining that is not in itself sufficient to protect immigrant workers, especially when entrepreneurs are intent on solutions that discriminate against them. In these cases the "peripheral" position of immigrant workers in the union (despite their substantial numbers) and the general precariousness of the workers' condition end up making adequate trade-union action impossible.

We find the union officials we interviewed taking two different positions on this situation. On the one hand, there are those who admit how things stand and are self-critical.

*"We presented a platform at the national level of the FIOM which contains three or four specific demands that especially regard immigrant workers. (...) Remember that when we held assemblies to discuss these specific themes, we were confronted with some workers who said: "No, it's not right to make these demands because it means that the immigrant worker and the Brescian worker are treated differently." We also found some opposition on the part of Brescian union members who said it wasn't right to make these demands for these people. This situation, however, points to another sad truth: when it comes down to tackling the problems of company crises, even if it has never come out explicitly, in my view there is an attitude that says that if*

*somebody has got to get laid off, then you start with the North Africans, then the southern Italians, then the people from outside Brescia, then from the province of Brescia, and this is a racist attitude" (4004AM).*

In other cases the interviewees simply acknowledge the situation, as if it were an inevitable reality; and in an extreme case, one union official expresses dissatisfaction with the immigrants' lack of "adaptability" to their subaltern condition.

Question: *"As for the type of work done, do you find there is differentiation where immigrants are concerned between the jobs actually done and their contractual level?"*

Answer: *"Where the union is present, the solution is that - in compliance with the laws and the contract - they hire them at the lowest levels, but give them their due."*

Question: *"Getting back to the question of levels, you said that the firm hires at the lowest levels for lack of qualification: is it a justification that holds up?"*

Answer: *"No, it doesn't always hold up, there are cases in which jobs done previously, say, in other European countries [are not taken into consideration]" (4008AM).*

*"At Volkswagen you see, for example, that the Turks do the more manual labor while the Germans do the more specialized jobs ... but they've adapted to that type of work because they know that that condition is one of the conditions for being able to be there and to work. This is the sort of adaptation the immigrants in Italy lack" (4007AM).*

By contrast, we have also found cases of trade-union officials who strive to promote real equality between immigrant and native workers. Here are two significant and paradigmatic examples: similar situations, but the behavior of the union officials involved was completely different.

In the first case the union, negotiating with a firm for the hiring of some employment agency workers for permanent jobs, opposed the proposal of the company, which was intent on maintaining the discretionary power of deciding what workers to hire - with the clear intention of hiring Italian workers. The union demanded that the objective criterion of length of service be applied, knowing full well that this would have favored the immigrants.

In the second case, the union was engaged in negotiations with a firm regarding promotions: of the ten native and immigrant workers who were qualified, the union brokered an agreement for five promotions - accepting that the workers promoted all be Italians.

*"This firm was utilizing agency workers, exceeding all legal limits. They had 52 people there on agency jobs and we asked them to hire a part of them. In the end a union agreement was reached that provided for the hiring of 23 of the 52 workers. The firm wanted to maintain its discretionality in choosing the 23 people to hire.*

*Obviously among the 52 people there were both North Africans and Brescians. In the agreement the FIOM managed to get a commitment that the first 23 would be selected on the basis of length of service. During the negotiation the firm - and these are really things that bear remembering - rejected the agreement until the very end because it said that the first 23 were almost all North Africans, which meant that some Brescians risked being left out. But we insisted: 'It's right to give precedence to the people who've been working for more than two years.'" (4004AM).*

*"In the unionized firms we do manage to get something done, but this something, to be perfectly honest, also impacts with some unconscious or conscious discrimination. In my experience, on occasion - even quite recently - I've had to deal with the fact that I was asking for ten promotions, I obtain five of them mediating with the firm and tendentially the five are filled by Italians" (4008AM).*

These examples are emblematic of the problems faced by trade unions in attempting to promote the rights of immigrant workers. Two further points demand attention: employers exploit these situations to create elements of division between immigrant and native workers and, thereby, to weaken the unions; the presence of immigrant representatives in the union and an immigrant movement in general is of fundamental importance in combating discrimination. In the second episode it is the union official himself who points this out in the course of the interview; as for the first episode, it is not fortuitous that it took place in Brescia, scene of one of the greatest struggles for immigrant rights in Italy in recent years.<sup>55</sup>

The situation at Zanussi, which we will be focusing on in the next section, confirms the picture we have sketched. Although immigrant workers are progressively being integrated in the unions there is not yet correspondence between the unionization of immigrants and union action, which seldom comes fully to grips with their real needs.

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<sup>55</sup> See, in this regard, Section 5.

The rise in the number of immigrant workers in trade unions and their greater representation in union organizations in the workplace [RSUs]<sup>56</sup> are indicative of their determination to participate and their need - and necessity - to take part in an organization that is prepared to share the at times specific and particular problems they have to cope with inside and outside the workplace. At the same time, however, we see union officials taking see-sawing and ambiguous positions, and this has most certainly not encouraged a solid participation of immigrant workers in union life and activities. Union officials themselves remark on the insubstantial participation of immigrant workers in the assemblies; but, as we know, non-participation or self-isolation are often the results of external pressure.

Question: *"When paid assemblies are held, do the immigrant workers participate?"*

Answer: *"The ones from Africa, yes. The others, no. We've got a problem in this area too."*

Question: *"What type of participation is there?"*

Answer: *"They listen, but even listening is a problem. A few years ago we had a delegate who spoke some foreign languages, so there were assemblies held in French, in English. Now, unfortunately, we can only speak with them in Italian. So even the assemblies get heavy. Because you speak quickly, often you even speak in dialect" (4025WM).*

Self-criticism regarding the lack of language skills is indicative of the union's awareness of its delay in coming to grips with the integration of immigrant workers in union life. Indeed, the immigrants' lack of participation cannot be ascribed to a lack of interest on their part, as this union official rightly stresses.

*"The strange thing is that during the 8-hour strikes [the immigrants] enter [the factory], [while if we in the union] hold a referendum on the pre-contract, the number of foreigners that vote is very high. (...) So you understand that, after all, there really is an interest" (4025WM).*

The immigrants' lack of participation in strikes is a recurrent theme in the interviews with union officials. There is awareness of the greater difficulties for immigrant workers due to their lack of economic resources and the precariousness of their juridico-administrative condition, but this awareness has not induced the unions to redefine their policies and come to grips with the real

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<sup>56</sup> The current RSU at Zanussi includes 4 immigrant workers (1 FIOM, 2 FIM and 1 UILM); in the previous RSU there were three, one for each union.

conditions of immigrants, especially inside the factory. For the FIOM, for example, it has been particularly difficult to convince immigrant workers to take part in the blocking of overtime on Saturdays;<sup>57</sup> in certain cases the issue has even led to some immigrants' leaving the union. This was the case, for example, with an immigrant delegate who would not - or, due to economic need, could not - support the protest.

According to the immigrant union representatives we interviewed, the insufficient participation of immigrant workers in union life and activities is due to a lack of receptivity on the part of the unions, which do little to encourage them.

Question: *"What is the level of participation of immigrant workers in the assemblies and demonstrations organized by the unions?"*

Answer: *"Very few participate. There's something important to be said. They [the unions] don't want to communicate. I, as a union representative, cannot say it depends on ignorance. They [the unions] don't want to come towards us"* (4029AM).

The judgment of one former union representative is more caustic, expressing dissatisfaction with her Italian colleagues' indifference to the specific problems that can condition the life - also the working life - of an immigrant worker.

*"Because when the immigrants come to work, they think only about work. So the Italians start to say 'you're ruining the factory, we fought to have rights and you always work on Saturdays.' But they don't know why that person is doing it, maybe he lives 6,000 kilometers away and he needs a three-month vacation"* (4031WM).

## **6.7 The case of Electrolux-Zanussi in Susegana**

The Electrolux-Zanussi plant in Susegana is a concrete example of the "racial division of labor" present in Italy. In this firm, in fact, the immigrant workers fill the lowest positions, do the heaviest jobs and have little possibility of professional advancement. What is more, the firm

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<sup>57</sup> For several years now, as a form of protest during labor disputes, the FIOM, generally on Saturdays, has picketed the factories to "block" workers who have been commanded to work overtime.

represents a first, initial process of "ethnicization" of the production process within the factory. An analysis of this firm will permit us to make some further remarks on racial discrimination, on the role of the unions, and on their relations with immigrants.

The entry of immigrant workers made it possible for the firm both to reduce labor costs by keeping wage levels low, and to broach elements of division between workers by means of a rigid racially hierarchized division of labor.

Electrolux-Zanussi was one of the first large Italian firms to directly employ immigrant workers in production. Like most other large companies in Italy, for quite some time Zanussi had been indirectly employing immigrants through subcontracting firms, cooperatives for loading and unloading in particular. The full and proper entry of immigrant workers in the Susegana plant took place between 1997 and 1998; today at Zanussi, out of 2160 employees, about 300 of whom are clerks, there are nearly 500 immigrant workers. The bulk of them is composed of Senegalese, Ghanaians, Nigerians, as well as Chinese and Bengalis. The Bengalis have been the last to arrive and most of them are working through employment agencies. There are no eastern European workers, even though they make up the majority of the immigrant workers in the region; and there are few Maghrebian workers, even though there is a great number of them in the region as well.

All workers - immigrants or not - enter Zanussi through a two-step process: first on temporary or employment agency contracts, followed (possibly) by their hiring with permanent job contracts. This permanent contract provides for the so-called "entry wage," a very low monthly salary (around 800 euros) for the first three years. The interviewees consider the introduction of the "entry wage" to be the main reason why many Italian workers have kept away from this factory.

*"It's not that the entry wage was invented for the immigrants. Zanussi invented the entry wage to save money on hirings. With such [low] wages, people looking for work will look elsewhere. Unfortunately they [the immigrants] are in the condition that either they accept this or they'll have trouble getting it [this money]. So in a short time you have a work force where the new people hired are all foreigners, coming in with the entry wage" (4024WM).*

The immigrant workers are almost always hired as unskilled labor, even though many of them have acquired good skills and professional experience in other firms. One characteristic of the immigrant workers hired at Zanussi is that they have been present for some time in the Italian

labor market; the firm, except for one specific case, has never brought in employees from abroad. This is not surprising, and is in keeping with the Italian migration model: firms like Zanussi have no need to look abroad; they generally focus on those workers who, coming up from the "underground" economy through amnesty, look for steadier and more secure jobs in a big company.

At Zanussi most of the immigrants are employed in the unhealthiest departments, with the most tiring work and which the Italian workers seek to avoid: in the departments where we find particularly noxious and heavy jobs (foaming, packaging, thermoforming) we find almost exclusively immigrant workers.

*"They put the Senegalese in the departments where it's hottest, close to the foaming, because they can bear the heat. They tried it with me, but I couldn't take it. They told me: 'What! but you're an African!'" (4031WM).*

*"If you go into certain departments, the ones we consider the toughest, say, thermoforming, where there are really high temperatures, or if you go into the foaming department, which is even more noxious, you're sure to find the foreigners. You also find them on the assembly lines together with the others (...) but there are departments where the black dominates" (4025WM).*

At Zanussi there is a high level of horizontal mobility, so nearly all the workers have a chance to do different types of job. Here too, however, the immigrants and the Italians do not have an equal chance of getting out of the most harmful and tiring posts.

*"When the Italians say: 'I don't want to work here,' they almost always manage to leave that post. If an Italian worker, man or woman, thinks the work is heavy, the chief finds them another post. He prefers to leave the heaviest work to us" (4029AM).*

At Zanussi it is rare that immigrant workers fill positions of responsibility. There is practically no vertical mobility. Seven years after their entering the factory there are still no foremen or shift foremen of foreign origin, and very few immigrants have obtained the qualification of specialized worker, even though quite a few of them hold degrees and diplomas.

*"Some years after their entry, now you begin to see a few foreign repair workers, in particular from North Africa. There are also two women off the assembly line, also from North Africa. Nothing else" (4025WM).*

*"They've never taken a non-European for a position of responsibility. I'm the first [the interviewee is, also, a woman], so I've had some problems. It's normal, because they've never seen a non-European who commands, who gives orders. Even if I do it very politely, they just can't accept it" (4031WM).*

The most common justifications given for this state of affairs are a lack of motivation on the part of the immigrant workers, who will not commit themselves to long-term careers with the firm, or their failure to learn the Italian language. But both these reasons are nothing but pretexts: the truth of the matter is that immigrants today are more and more committed to stability, inside and outside the workplace.

*"The other day, speaking with an [immigrant] co-worker, he told me: 'We'll never have a chance of getting ahead because our skin is different.' I tried to convince him it [skin color] didn't matter, but that it's up to them to show they really want to get ahead, because it's clear that anyone who wants to move up from simple assembly-line worker has got to show greater commitment" (4012WM).*

Far more cogent, by contrast, is the remark by a worker from Bangladesh, a college graduate, who insists that the racial hierarchy in the factory is scientifically created by the company itself.

*"I applied to another factory for a specialized job, I had all my documents in order. They told me: 'Where will we put you? If we give you a position of responsibility, they'll all pick up and leave.' The same thing happens at Zanussi" (4029AM).*

This "de-responsibilization" strategy implemented by the firm is indicative of its own responsibilities in creating a given state of affairs. The racism inherent in this system of the division of labor is founded on the apparent "privilege" of the native worker to the detriment of the immigrant and is exploited by the company to keep its workers divided.

At this point, we need to examine the case of the Italian-Argentinean workers. Zanussi took part in a project, promoted and funded by the Veneto Region, designed to train specialized Argentinean personnel of Italian origin and have them emigrate to Italy; only Argentineans who could demonstrate their Italian origins were eligible.

Cloaked in a false solidarity with the Italian-Argentineans hit by the economic crisis, this project was above all a politico-ideological operation designed to show that peoples of Italian origin could be better integrated than other immigrant populations with less "cultural affinity."

Trained in Argentina, hired with permanent job contracts and qualified as specialized workers, guaranteed housing for six months, these workers were publicly presented as a model of "acceptable" immigration,<sup>58</sup> because - as direct descendants of old Italian immigrants - they were members of a "common race."

The introduction of these Italian-Argentinean workers, hired in a manner that completely broke with the standard procedures (which, as we recall, consist in a temporary contract and then the "entry wage"), created new elements of division between the workers.

"[The Italian-Argentinean immigrants] *do jobs that are different from [better than] ours. They do maintenance work, or are machinery technicians, or are employed in the warehouse. So the other workers were asking: 'How come they arrive and are immediately assigned to the warehouse and we're still on the trolley?'*" (4025WM).

Once again it is the code of nationality that determines the worker's position in the company. The hierarchization within the factory has been further subdivided: no longer only immigrants and natives, but now also a new figure of "noble" immigrant halfway between the two.

A heatedly debated theme within the unions has been that of vacations. In 2001 the CISL and the UIL signed an agreement with Zanussi establishing that certain immigrant workers, at the company's discretion, would be permitted to combine their vacation periods with their unpaid overtime in order to accumulate longer vacations. The purpose was to give an opportunity to return to their home countries to those workers who come from far away and thus need a longer vacation period than others. This agreement was heatedly contested by the FIOM, which

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<sup>58</sup> Zanussi-Electrolux brought nearly one hundred workers to Italy, distributing them in their various plants in the Veneto.

considered it prejudicial to the principle of equal treatment because exclusively reserved for immigrant workers.<sup>59</sup>

The position assumed by this union is to a certain extent indicative not only of the difficulty of the question itself, but also of the difficulty of the union as a whole in embracing the demands of immigrant workers and making them its own. If on the one hand the FIOM contested the measures designed to favor the temporary return of immigrants to their home countries, because - *absurdly* - it deemed such a return a "privilege," on the other hand the FIOM has neither debated nor actively opposed the discrimination to which immigrant workers are subject within the company.

The unions - nevertheless - do appear to show an awareness of these difficulties, also because they know full well that in the future they will have to come to terms with the presence and with the action of immigrant workers. In part, because the sector of work done for hire has a large and structural presence of immigrants; and in part because these workers demand and deserve greater involvement in the union structures. Let us now see how the immigrants have responded to this state of affairs.

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<sup>59</sup> The national union leadership disclaimed responsibility for this position.

## SECTION 5

### RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE

#### **1. Immigrant self-organization: experiences of struggle and resistance.**

In Italy the immigrants' drive for self-organization has taken two distinct, and in part also separate, forms: immigrants' associations and the participation of immigrant workers in the labor movement.

A great number of associations have been constituted since the late 1980s, but they have also manifested a certain fragility. This has been due to the permanent precariousness that characterizes the working and the juridical conditions of the mass of immigrants, as well as to the migration policies of the Italian state that have hindered - not helped - the process of self-organization of immigrant populations. Despite this fragility, there has been a trend over the years to constitute associations of a multi-national character, which have gradually taken their place alongside the mono-national associations that are still prevalent today.

As far as the relations between immigrants and trade unions are concerned, it must be said that it has been the immigrants themselves who have taken the initiative in approaching the unions, and in this the immigrant associations have played an important role. Only later, as we have seen, did the unions begin to take specific responsibilities with regard to immigrant workers, to better defend them as immigrants, and with regard to the world of immigrant associations themselves.

In the course of time both the associations and the trade unions have put forward demands designed - first - to improve the immigrants' juridico-administrative status, beginning with questions "outside" the workplace (most importantly, obtaining and renewing residence permits), and then - very timidly - to tackle questions of employment relationships. It has been fifteen years now since the first major initiatives by immigrants against the discrimination and

racism they are subjected to;<sup>60</sup> on the whole, the self-organization and organization of immigrants in Italy has progressed, despite many difficulties. But for these initiatives to attain their objectives, there is still a long way to go. Just as there is a long way to go before the experience of the immigrants' associations and the experience of their participation in union life come together in a single unitary experience of resistance and struggle.

## 2. The struggles for residence permits

As we have said, it has been since the late 1980s that the immigrant populations in Italy have been constituting networks of help and support that in some cases have assumed full-fledged juridical status. In this period associations of Senegalese immigrants,<sup>61</sup> associations of South American political refugees, and associations of foreign students, have all played a key role in getting the process of organizing immigrant populations underway. This was no easy matter, because Italian migration policy and the position of hostility assumed by many institutions and a large slice of society induced a great many immigrant associations to fall back on the religious dimension or on the defense of their own cultural traditions.

The development of the process of self-organization that took place in the early 1990s did, however, lead to an initial and partial unification of the numerous mono-national associations throughout the country. The process was very slow and discontinuous. Apart from important episodes that were limited to single cities, such as the Pantanella case in Rome,<sup>62</sup> the

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<sup>60</sup> The first circumstance in which immigrants made their appearance on the Italian political scene was the protest following the killing of Jerry Masslo, a South African refugee who had fled the apartheid regime; he was killed in August of 1989 in Villa Literno, not far from Naples. On the overall condition of immigrant populations in Italy, see Perocco, F., "L'apartheid italiano," in Basso, P. and Perocco, F. (eds.), *Gli immigrati in Europa. Disuguaglianze, razzismo, lotte*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2003, pp. 211-233; ENAR, *Shadow report: Italy*, report funded by the European Commission, General Employment and Social Affairs Division, edited by S. Cerretelli, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> See Schmidt di Friedberg, O., "I muridi nell'emigrazione: una confraternità senegalese tra solidarietà e profitto," in Delle Donne, M., Melotti, U. and Petilli, S. (eds.), *Immigrazione in Europa. Solidarietà e conflitto*, Rome: Cediss, 1993, pp. 523-535.

<sup>62</sup> Besides these associations, the late 1980s witnessed the beginning of a direct, if poorly coordinated, mobilization of immigrants, characterized by a squatters' movement and demonstrations for the right to housing (in Rome, Milan and Bologna). In connection with these movements, one of the first multinational organizations was constituted, the United Asia Workers Association (UAWA), which brought together Pakistani, Bengali, and other Asian workers in general. UAWA members spearheaded the first significant example of immigrant self-organization in Italy; namely, the case of the Pantanella, a disused pasta factory in the Casilina Vecchia district in Rome, which in the course of 1990 was occupied for

demonstration of the Muslims in Turin,<sup>63</sup> the demonstration of the Rumanians in Lucca,<sup>64</sup> or the initiatives of the Albanian associations constituted after the sinking of the Albanian ship *Kater I Radesh*,<sup>65</sup> the late 1990s also witnessed the first nationwide demonstrations of immigrants in Italy.

It was the delays and the denials of residence permits, connected with the 1999 amnesty, that sparked a series of demonstrations and led to the constitution of the first bodies of national coordination of the dawning immigrant movement. Initially, in this case too we witnessed "local" demonstrations: first in Rome, in October of 1999, led by the Dhuumcatu association, composed of workers from the Indian subcontinent; then it was the turn of the Kosovar workers in Siena, followed by the Chinese immigrants in Naples.

There is no question, however, that the local initiative with the greatest national impact in that period was the one in Brescia in May of 2000, involving more than five thousand immigrants whose applications for the regularization of their position had been rejected. In light of this rejection, approximately two to three thousand Indian and Pakistani immigrants held a permanent demonstration in front of police headquarters, while two thousand Senegalese men

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about six months by a large group of immigrant workers of various nationalities. See Knights, M. and King, R., "The geography of Bangladeshi migration to Rome," in *International Journal of Population Geography*, IV, 4, 1998, pp. 299-321.

<sup>63</sup> See Sciortino, R., "L'organizzazione del proletariato immigrato in Italia," in Basso, P. and Perocco, F. (eds.), *Gli immigrati in Europa*, op. cit., pp. 393-394.

<sup>64</sup> The demonstration in Florence on 29 January 2000 was characterized by the front-line presence of a large group of Rumanian workers from Lucca, without residence permits, who took such an active part in the mobilization that the head of police administration of Florence was dismissed for having permitted "illegals" the freedom to express and demand their rights. Meanwhile the Ministry of the Interior rejected the regularization plan presented by a group of Rumanian workers and a number of secular and religious associations in Lucca on the basis of Presidential Decree 5.8.1998. The Rumanian community of Lucca, whose expulsion had been verbally announced by the Prefecture, organized the occupation of the Church of San Michele and asked the government to recognize the ties the community had established with the people of Lucca. During the ensuing hunger strike 1,500 Lucca natives signed a petition of solidarity and a strong network of solidarity was created between the Italians and the immigrants. The 27 families inside the church received delegations of national and regional political leaders. On February 15th the Prefecture announced that the immigrants would be granted residence permits.

<sup>65</sup> On 18 March 2000 the family members of the Albanian immigrants who died on 28 March 1997 in the wreck of the Albanian ship *Kater I Radesh*, together with survivors of the wreck, instituted a civil action. In the wreck, caused by the ramming of the *Kater I Radesh* by the Italian navy ship *Sibilla*, 108 people died. The criminal proceedings were promoted by the Albanian immigrants of Associazione Illiria. This association also played a leading role, in 2003, in an important negotiation with the Prefecture of Rome regarding the juridical conditions of enrollment of Albanian university students in Italy. See [www.digilander.libero.it/infoprc/kater4.html](http://www.digilander.libero.it/infoprc/kater4.html) (September 2004); *Il Manifesto*, 11-22-2003.

and women went on a hunger strike.<sup>66</sup> This was the spark that in just a few months spread to a number of other cities.

But the events in Brescia deserve closer attention. At the national level, in fact, this province is one of the most developed poles of the metalworking sector;<sup>67</sup> in Brescia there are a great many immigrant workers who are employed in this sector and are active in trade-union organizations. Despite the presence of these workers the local unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL) did not take the initiative in the immigrant rights movement; rather, they were swayed by events - and, above all, by the pressure of their unionized immigrant workers - to actively support the mobilization. Thanks to the unions' intervention the protest of the Brescia immigrants was brought to the attention of the government. And in fact it was the meetings in Rome between immigrant representatives from Brescia (accompanied by a number of union leaders) and a representative of the government that led to closer relations between the immigrants of the two cities, culminating in the publication of the following joint appeal:

"We, immigrants fighting for the right to exist, call upon all foreign and Italian citizens and civil society to build together two great demonstrations against illegality:<sup>68</sup> Saturday, June 17th in Brescia and Sunday, June 18th in Rome. We ask for the immediate issuing of the residence permits that guarantee legality and rights to people who have been waiting for them for two years. A positive response to this grievance is an indispensable condition for stemming a backwardness that is not only legislative but of civility. Beginning on June 17th and 18th we want to relaunch the mobilization for: the right to legality, for everyone forced into illegal entry and residence; equality in the social and civil rights of citizenship; the right of all migrants, Roms, refugees, to live free from the fear of expulsion, eviction, discrimination and racism in a country free from ghettos and places of segregation."

This was the first time in Italy in which the entire world of immigration moved, to a certain extent, in unison. In the days leading up to June 17th there was a ferment of immigrant auto-activation in various parts of the country. One action particularly worthy of note took place in Bovezzo (in the province of Brescia), where live hundred African immigrants, mostly from Senegal. There, the handing out of leaflets to promote the June 17th demonstration evolved into an extremely lively collective debate involving some six hundred people. The *daayras* (the

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<sup>66</sup> See Tedeschi, M. and Pinocchio, C., *I due viaggi. Storia della lotta degli immigrati bresciani*, Brescia: Il Grafo, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> See Fiom-Cgil Brescia, *Cento anni con i lavoratori. La Fiom di Brescia dal 1901 al 2001*, Brescia, 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Against the illegal status imposed on the immigrant population.

Muridic religious circles) and speeches by the *marabouts* gave voice to the protest; in a local discotheque the Senegalese musician T. Seck urged the public to participate in the procession, while in an industrial shed in Montirone, another small town in the province of Brescia that hosts a *gurdvara* (a Sikh temple), thousands of leaflets were distributed to be delivered to Indian immigrants, even if not of the Sikh faith.

The zenith of the mobilization for residence permits was the *national* demonstration in Brescia on 17 June 2000, with the participation of some fifteen thousand people. Dino Greco, secretary of the Brescia CGIL, summed things up very well: "The foreigners have entered politics, this demonstration has been a civil embrace of the city, which responded with no shadow of fear." The following day, in Rome, another ten thousand immigrants mounted their demonstration. And during the summer of that year there were fresh demonstrations in Turin, and once again in Rome and Brescia. The immigrants who had already obtained their residence permits carried on with the protest in favor of other immigrants "still waiting" for theirs.

On the heels of this experience - the first in which immigrant and trade-union initiatives interacted - Brescia became a focal point for the political activism of immigrant workers. The unions - the FIOM in particular - now showed their hands, giving their support to the immigrants' demands. But let us not forget that, even now, the battles - beginning with the one for residence permits - were waged above all by committees *outside* the unions. The testimony of one of our interviewees is emblematic in this respect:

*"In Brescia the Immigrants' Committees played a role that was perhaps even more important than that of the unions. Especially on the problems of immigrants, which they live through themselves. Thanks to the immigrants' struggle we did succeed in improving the situation. Yes, there's the union; but up front there's always the immigrant"* (4022AM).

### **3. Immigrant and trade-union self-organization**

The integration of immigrants in trade-union organizations has come about through two different policies (two different practices): the policy of specific services dedicated to the problems of immigrants, and the policy of negotiation at the sectorial level.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Mottura, G., "Immigrati e sindacato," in Pugliese, E. (ed.), *Rapporto Immigrazione. Lavoro, sindacato, società*, Rome: Ediesse, 2000, pp. 113-134.

The policy of "specific services" led to the creation of structures outside the union itself to deal with the immigrants' immediate needs (housing, residence permits, learning the language). If in the first phase of the migration experience immigrants were obliged to turn to these structures, when their process of social integration was consolidated also their relation with the unions changed.<sup>70</sup> For a long initial period trade unions provided immigrant workers no more than assistance and support services; then, the increasingly greater rate of immigrant unionization began to influence (somewhat) the union policies on immigration questions. In this phase, the unions were compelled to integrate the immediate problems posed by immigrants - especially questions of residence permits, housing, and vacations - with union negotiations at the level of the sector or the company.

In this way the union, which in the 1980s and 1990s had on several occasions denounced situations of exploitation and discrimination suffered by immigrant workers - as in the famous cases of Ravenna<sup>71</sup> and of Villa Literno,<sup>72</sup> the first time the working condition of immigrants was brought to the attention of the Italian public - has gradually become the most important public institution to which immigrants turn, the *only* one where they find a certain recognition. And it was above all the immigrant workers of the metalworking and shipbuilding sectors who urged their unions to organize the first regional and national strikes on immigration issues.

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<sup>70</sup> See Università di Venezia/Laboratorio sull'immigrazione, *Gli immigrati maghrebini in Veneto*, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> In Ravenna on 13 March 1987 thirteen workers died, some of them North Africans. The cause of the tragedy was spelled out in a communiqué by the FIOM, which recalled the working conditions of the dead workers: "This was not a fatality, but rather a product of the situation that has come about in the port and industrial areas, especially in petrochemical enterprises such as Sarom, Enichem, Agip, and in naval dockyards. The indiscriminate use of undocumented labor and of subcontracting has given rise to the worst forms of illicit hiring practices imaginable." In early autumn the FIOM began to announce the names of this host of small and short-lived subcontractors and of some entrepreneurs who had institutionalized the practice of subcontracting, including the owners of Mecnavi, the site of the disaster. See <http://www.fondazionecipriani.it/Kronologia> (July 2004).

<sup>72</sup> In Villa Literno, in the province of Caserta, the summer tomato harvest employs numerous undocumented North African workers, subjected to ten-to-eleven hour shifts and inhuman living conditions (lack of housing and of any other structure that can meet their most elementary needs). During an attempted robbery on the night of 25 August 1989, Jerry Masslo, a South African worker, was killed, and two of his companions, Kirago Antony Yrugo, a Kenyan, and Bol Janson, a Sudanese, were wounded. On August 30th at the funeral of the young South African, Alassane N'diaye, a Senegalese, in the name of the Coordination of Immigrant Workers of the CGIL in Villa Literno, read Jerry Masslo's political testament before the high offices of state. In the wake of these events, on October 7th in Rome one of the first national demonstrations "For the Rights of Immigrants and Equality" was held, promoted by Italian secular and religious associations, by the daily newspaper *Il Manifesto*, and by the RAI television program *Nonsoloneo*, with the support of the unions CGIL-CISL-UIL. See <http://www.lospettro.it/pagina568.htm> (July 2004).

The first general strike of immigrant workers took place in the Veneto, in Vicenza, on 15 May 2002.<sup>73</sup> The main target of this "strike of the migrants" was the Bossi-Fini law, but it was also in defense of article 18 of the Workers' Statute of Rights,<sup>74</sup> and was organized by the unionized immigrant workers with the help of *a part* of the CGIL, CISL and UIL union delegates. All the workers participated in the strike, but it is significant that the immigrants struck for the entire day while the Italian workers struck for just one hour. Nonetheless, in one of the statements issued by the president of the Forum of Foreign Communities of Vicenza it is clear that in this strike - the first of its kind in Italy - the immigrant workers were aware of the need to wage their union battle side by side with the native workers: "It is something new, this is clear. A new way of making the role of immigrants visible in Italy. We want to stop the factories, for one day, to make the rich Veneto understand what our contribution to the well-being of the collectivity really is. We would like to demonstrate together with the Italians, because the attack on our rights is linked to the attack on all workers; it is not by chance that we ourselves took part in the strikes against the abolition of article 18."<sup>75</sup>

From statements by the participants it emerges that there was intimidation on the part of the entrepreneurs: in fact, many of the workers had to clash with their employers for recognition - or self-recognition - of their right to strike. As we said, the strike called for a work-stoppage of eight hours for the immigrants and one hour for the Italian workers, but in fact many native workers took part in the demonstration. Indeed, we recall the banner of the Valbruna steelworks, carried by young workers hailing from southern Italy, reaffirming the Italian workers' solidarity with the experience of these immigrants coming from abroad.

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<sup>73</sup> With industrial workers composing 50.7% of the entire labor force (data from 2001), Vicenza is one of the most industrialized provinces in Italy; see Unione regionale delle camere di commercio, industria, artigianato e agricoltura del Veneto, *Relazione sulla situazione economica del Veneto nel 2002*, Venice, 2003. The metalworking industry is concentrated around the city of Schio and employs about two fifths of the workers of the entire industrial sector, principally in the electromechanical division and in the production of machine tools for wood, ceramics and marble; see Camera di commercio, industria, artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *I settori economici nel Vicentino ed i loro elementi di debolezza*, Vicenza, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> This article (from a law of May 1970) establishes that firms with over 15 employees can dismiss their workers only with "just cause." The Berlusconi government has often declared its intention to abolish this article or, at least, "reform" it to the detriment of workers. In 2002 and 2003 the unions - in particular the CGIL - reacted against this intention with statements and demonstrations. Also the immigrants' associations - in particular the "Comitato Immigrati in Italia" - have taken a stand against the reform of article 18.

<sup>75</sup> See *Il Manifesto* (5-14-2002).

After the success of the Vicenza demonstration the immigrant workers, supported by the CGIL, CISL and UIL, demonstrated once again, in Padua on 31 July 2002, this time against the proposed Bossi-Fini law; once again the turnout was very great.

At the national level it has been within the CGIL and the FIOM that immigrant workers have been most able to make themselves heard. In fact, nearly six months before the Vicenza demonstration it was the CGIL that promoted the national demonstration against the Bossi-Fini law of 19 January 2002.

One hundred thousand people turned out for the Rome demonstration: the majority of them were immigrants. There were four delegations at the head of the procession: the Pakistani, in memory of the ship *Iohan* that sank on the night of 24 December 1996; the Maghrebian, in memory of those who died at the Temporary Accommodation Center in Trapani; the Albanian, in memory of the *Kater I Radesh* "tragedy"; and the Kurdish, in memory of the many Kurds who in the previous months had drowned in the sea or died asphyxiated in trucks or containers in the attempt to reach Italy.

Also the demonstration on 29 January 2002 against the "reform" of article 18 of the Workers' Statute of Rights witnessed a very substantial participation of immigrant workers, aware that the new legislation on immigration and the attempt to modify article 18 were part of a self-same policy to cut back the costs and the rights of the work force. Strikes against the modification of article 18 continued throughout the month of February, especially in the metalworking sector in Brescia, Turin and Naples, culminating in the huge national demonstration of 23 March 2002, when three million workers (called by the CGIL) took to the streets of Rome.

It is important to emphasize that, beginning late in 2002, the demonstrations and strikes revealed a growing integration of such issues as the casualization of employment relationships, legislation on immigration, and - at times - the war in Iraq. It is also true, however, that the question of the conditions of immigrant workers in the factory and the workplace have tended to be left behind. Today, the challenge facing trade unions and immigrant workers is one of extending the collective action performed up to now from concerns *outside* to concerns *inside* the factory.

It will not be an easy process, because even today a great many immigrant workers are relegated to the least unionized areas of the labor market - areas such as subcontracted work, employment agency work, undocumented work. And for these workers - who have to endure a difficult condition of underemployment and submit to many forms of discrimination - joining a union is no easy matter. Such workers generally feel they are more and better represented by immigrant associations or voluntary and solidarity associations than by the unions themselves; unions that -

despite frequent criticism - constitute a point of reference for the workers of larger firms, whose residence in our country has been stabilized to some extent. There is a real risk that this objective differentiation of the condition of immigrant workers may produce a *double-track* of immigrant self-organization and organization. Indeed, such a risk has recently manifested itself in the latest local and national residence-permit demonstrations that took place in Rome late in 2004. Just fifteen days apart, and on practically the same issues, two different demonstrations were held in Rome, one organized by ARCI and the Social Forums, the other by the unions. One of the urgent tasks now facing both the immigrants and the unions is the task of overcoming such "division." Otherwise, action against discrimination and racism will continue to be highly discontinuous and rather weak.

## SECTION 6

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE TRADE UNION PRACTICE**

On the basis of the results of our historical research, our survey, and our analysis of the literature available on the same subject, we would like to make some possible suggestions for the improvement of trade-union action to be implemented at various levels and at different moments.

With reference to the system of production relations, trade unions face an important long-term challenge involving the idea of society itself. As the immigrants' movement has pointed out clearly<sup>76</sup>, Italian trade unions are urged to act with more decision in order to fight against the segregation of immigrants in the work place and the hierarchization of the labour market on a racial basis.

Trade unions play a key role, as they can conform to the reorganization of inequalities and social stratification with a passive attitude or oppose it. They can accept the prevailing practices and opinions, thus supporting the criterion of "priority to national workers" and the idea that immigration is merely a resource for the development of our nation and, as a consequence, a temporary factor; or, in alternative, they can also act in order to identify and integrate the requirements expressed by immigrants, establishing a closer connection than today with the experiences of self-organization made by immigrants outside trade unions and with the local-born associations that operate in this field.

Many sectors within the immigrants' movement are already urging trade unions to abandon the idea of trade unions as a simple "aid society" for workers and act completely as a collective body with the power to weigh on the forms of social organization and the mechanisms that

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<sup>76</sup> Cfr. *Il Comitato Immigrati in Italia: documenti*, in Basso, P. – Perocco, F. (a cura di), *Gli immigrati in Europa. Disuguaglianze, razzismo, lotte*, op. cit.

govern them. Immigrants have already brought this great challenge to the attention of trade unions: now the time has come for trade unions to react.

As for short-term actions, we have observed that over the past years trade unions have dealt with immigration mainly outside work places; it is only recently that trade-union organizations have started to deal with immigrants as workers –and not everywhere. Now they have to focus their attention (which they still do too shyly) on the actual working conditions in the factories; they have to be more careful when watching over the respect of fair treatment, a principle which until now has been much neglected, especially in a growing number of enterprises where trade unions are not present. Trade unions have often accepted the idea that in Italy immigrants live in a condition of contrast between “work integration” and “social exclusion”; this idea is based on the two-word slogan “workers but not citizens”. We should not forget that the social segregation and exclusion which still affect the majority of immigrants are actually rooted not outside, but *inside* the factories, in the working conditions immigrants are subjected to. This is the reason why trade unions, immigrant workers, the immigrants’ movement, and local-born associations must go beyond the issues –however legitimate and undeniable- of residence permits, legal status, etc., and develop their own initiatives on the conditions of immigrants in the work place. In our view, the most vulnerable aspects requiring urgent, systematic, and effective action from trade unions are: wages, recognition of the actual qualifications of immigrant workers, career advancements, payment of overtime work, injury protection, discrimination when hiring personnel.

These vulnerable aspects also depend on the institutional discriminations deriving from our national legislation (immigration laws, regulations, circulars), which trade unions have recently criticized in an increasingly explicit way. The next step is, on the one hand, to relate these two aspects (*i.e.* direct discriminations and institutional discriminations) more closely, and, on the other hand, to go beyond a merely legalistic approach. At the same time, we believe that trade unions need to reduce the current separation between the issue of the “foreigner’s” legal status and the question of his/her working conditions. In doing so, they should do everything they can in order to avoid the risk that the question of immigration continues not to be considered -as currently happens- in many of their structures, or that it is dealt with keeping it systematically separate from other issues, for instance by means of *ad hoc* and *sine die* structures. In our opinion, *ad hoc* structures can be useful only at the very beginning of the process, as transit bodies aiming at introducing for immigrant workers the same procedures followed for local-born workers.

Finally, we suggest that trade unions should develop specific actions for the bargaining process, focusing on three main aspects: training for immigrants (which should take into account not only training in itself, but also some situations peculiar to immigrants); language learning; annual leave and visits to the countries of origin during their holidays.

In terms of trade-union organization, the signs of openness displayed by trade unions for immigrant workers over the past few years have to be strengthened in order to promote a greater and closer integration of immigrants within the structure and activities of the trade-union movement. A more dynamic and effective approach to the challenges posed by racism and racial discriminations requires a greater and stronger participation of immigrants in trade unions at every level. If it takes place, this process will work as an important antidote to the factors causing division between local-born workers and immigrant workers, which, as we have seen, may paralyze trade-union action and worsen the general situation of workers.

In order to achieve the gradual eradication, or at least the reduction, of contrasts between local-born workers and immigrant workers, trade-union activity must not be ambiguous. Everybody would certainly benefit from an awareness campaign on this subject. However, the biggest problem within trade unions themselves continues to be the lack of information about the discriminations still occurring and the lack of a general common approach in fighting them.

The more or less positive outcome of these processes will depend mainly on the degree of coordination between immigrants' unionization and trade-union policies, as well as the degree of unity between trade unions and local-born associations operating in support of immigrants. It is and it will be necessary to avoid the adoption of separate approaches by trade unions, local-born associations and the immigrants' movement. We feel strongly that Italian trade unions should transform themselves to be able to be the voice both of "Italian" and immigrant workers.