

From Victory to Defeat, from Defeat to Victory The Austro-Italian Front from Caporetto to Vittorio Veneto

National Museum of Contemporary History

Ljubljana, October 12 and 13, 2017



University of Ljubljana
FACULTY OF ARTS



Centre for the History of the First World War
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By the summer of 1917 the fighting on the Austro-Italian Front had been going on for two years. At first sight, the Italians were largely unsuccessful in their endeavours as the Austrian forces could prevent a large-scale breakthrough. However, the position of the Austrian army was increasingly precarious as it was threatened by the Italian advance along the Lower Isonzo and the exhaustion that was a consequence of a gruelling war on three fronts.

Therefore, the Germans finally decided to help their ally on the Italian Front. On October 24, 1917, the two Central Powers started an offensive, centred on the front sector between Bovec (Flitsch, Plezzo) and Tolmin (Tolmein, Tolmino). The offensive was a resounding success; Austrian and German troops advanced as far as the Piave River, capturing more than a quarter of a million Italian soldiers as well as large quantities of arms, ammunition, and other materiel. However, they were unable to knock Italy out of the war; the Piave line held and the Italian army was reinforced by a sizable French and British contingents. Also, the Italian Chief of Staff Luigi Cadorna was forced to resign and the Italian Army reorganised.

In June 1918, the Austrians started another offensive on the Piave, hoping to finally achieve a decisive victory. Yet their poorly supplied army was not able to achieve a breakthrough and the offensive ended in a failure. As the situation in Austria-Hungary continued to deteriorate, the balance of power swung decisively and four months later, as Austria-Hungary was effectively falling apart, the Italian Army launched a successful offensive that culminated in the final defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto.

Although the year 1917 did not prove to be the decisive year on the Italian Front, the breakthrough had an important impact on the development of the war in 1918. Our conference – the third in a series of conferences on the Austro-Italian Front during WWI – thus aims to bring together new research on the developments on both sides of the front in the period from the Battle of Caporetto to the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, in a contextual frame of a victory and/or defeat. We are interested in new research on military developments, reorganisation of the armed forces, the functioning of military and/or political alliances, the fates of civilians in occupied Italian territories or displaced inside the Kingdom, the Austrian administration of occupied Italian provinces and the return of Austrian refugees, propaganda, the peace movements and proposals, as well as other aspects of the final year of the Great War on the Austro-Italian Front. All of this should provide us with a better understanding of the development from victory to defeat and from defeat to victory.

Programme

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2017

TIME	SUBJECT
9:00	Morning coffee
9:30	Opening remarks
9:45	Keynote speech Mark Cornwall (University of Southampton), <i>Strong Myths and Personalities: The Spatial Experiment of the Italian Front</i>
10:45	Coffee break
11:15	Panel 1: The Military Chair: Borut Klabjan (Science and Research Centre Koper, European University Institute, Florence) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wolfgang Mährle (Provincial Archives Baden-Württemberg), <i>Der alte Alpino: Theodor Sprösser (1870-1933), Commander of the Württembergian Mountain Battalion, in the Campaign Against Italy 1917</i>• Marko Štepec (National Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana), <i>Slovenian Soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Battle of Kobarid</i>• Jiří Hutečka (University of Hradec Králové), <i>The Battle of the Piave as a Final Turning Point in Czech Soldiers' War Experience</i>
12.45	Coffee break

TIME	SUBJECT
13:00	<p>Panel 2: Repatriation and Reconstruction</p> <p>Chair: Kaja Širok (National Museum of Contemporary History, University of Ljubljana)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Francesco Frizzera (Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt), <i>Repatriation Policies in the Habsburg Empire and in the Successor States: The Tyrolean and Littoral Refugees after the Battle of Caporetto</i> • Petra Svoljšak (Milko Kos Historical Institute, Ljubljana; University of Nova Gorica), <i>Inbetween Victory and Defeat: The Isonzo War Zone after Caporetto</i> • Jernej Komac (University of Ljubljana), <i>Returning Home to an Alpine Wasteland: Area of Bovec and its Surroundings after the Offensive of 24 October 1917</i>
14:30	Lunch for participants (at the venue)
16:30	<p>Panel 3: The “Third Parties” after Caporetto</p> <p>Chair: Étienne Boisserie (Inalco CREE, Paris)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giacomo Innocenti (Catholic University Sacro Cuore, Milano), <i>The British Military Expedition after Caporetto: The British Army in Italy as Force Multiplier</i> • Mark Thompson (University of East Anglia, Norwich), <i>‘It is a bit more like war out here at present’: British Views about the Italian Front</i> • Roman Puff (University of Salzburg), <i>‘Bring Austria back into the fold’: Caporetto, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and the US Declaration of War of December 7, 1917</i>
19:00	<p>Reception at the Ljubljana Town Hall (Mestni trg 1, Rdeča dvorana)</p>

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2017

TIME	SUBJECT
9:00	Morning coffee
9:30	Panel 4: Pilots and Legionaries Chair: Rok Stergar (University of Ljubljana) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Richard Pogatschnigg (University of Klagenfurt), <i>Airpower on the Rise: The 'k.u.k. Luftfahrtruppen' vs. the 'Corpo Aeronautico Militare' from October 1917 to November 1918</i>• Przemyslaw Jaskółowski, <i>Poles and Polish Legionaries on the Italian Front from Caporetto to Piave</i>• Michal Kšiňan (Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava), <i>Štefánik and the Czechoslovak Action Abroad among France, Italy and Yugoslavs</i>
10:00	Coffee break
11:30	Panel 5: The Consequences: Emptiness; Psychiatry, and Submissiveness Chair: Catherine Horel (UMR Sirice, Paris) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giuliano Casagrande (Museum of the Battle of Vittorio Veneto), <i>Managing Emptiness: Civil Administration in Occupied Italy 1917-18</i>• Anna Grillini (German Historical Institut, Max Weber Foundation, Rome), <i>The Italian Military Neuro-Psychiatric Service after Caporetto</i>• Irene Guerrini (University of Genova), Marco Pluviano (CRID 14-18), <i>1918, a Turning Point in the Organization of Consent? The Building of a New, Submissive, Italian Citizen</i>
13:00	Coffee break
13:15	Concluding remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marco Mondini (University of Padua, Italo-German Historical Institute – FBK, Trento)
15:00	Lunch for participants (at Union Brewery, Celovška 22)

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The conference is organised by:

Department of History, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts
Milko Kos Historical Institute, Research Centre of the Slovenian
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National Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana

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Scientific committee:

Étienne Boisserie, Catherine Horel, Borut Klabjan, Marco Mondini, Rok Stergar, Petra Svoljšak, and Kaja Širok.

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