

## 6. The Jacini Enquiry in Italy, 1877–1885

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The ‘Agrarian Enquiry on agriculture and the conditions of the agricultural class’ was approved by the Chamber of Deputies on the 15th of March 1877.

The Agrarian Enquiry is one of a number of Enquiries conducted in the second part of the nineteenth century in Europe, particularly in the agricultural sector which was still the most important in terms of income produced and labour occupied. It produced an impressive quantity of documentation on Italy’s agriculture in the last decades of the nineteenth century: fifteen printed volumes, five of which were published in two tomes, one in three, plus a special Archive of the ‘Giunta for the Agrarian Enquiry’ in 24 folders, containing many unpublished monographs, at the ‘Archivio Centrale dello Stato’ in Rome. Nevertheless, neither the contemporary actors on the political and social scene nor historians have made relevant use of its results as they should have. To begin with, access to and circulation of the documents have been limited. The volumes were printed in a small quantity and few people subscribed to the series. It is difficult to find them in public libraries, except for the final Report of Stefano Jacini, the only document to be re-printed several times. Italian historiography, too, has scarcely used it. Apart from the essay by Novacco in the History of the Italian Parliament (Novacco, 1963) and the pioneering work of Caracciolo (Caracciolo, 1973) focused on the preparatory phases of the Enquiry in Parliament, we could cite Giacomina Nenci’s Introduction to the final report by Stefano Jacini (Jacini, 1976: I – XXXI) and the more recent contribution from Guidi (Guidi, 2002). For the rest, the Enquiry has been used only partially, in some regional studies (by Caracciolo on Umbria and Lazzarini on the Veneto) and, above all, in studies on some aspects regarding the vital conditions of farmers, such as housing and food supplies.

The first aim of this paper is to reconstruct the Parliamentary Enquiry from its origins through the discussions surrounding the Enquiry, both inside and outside the Italian Parliament, and the motivations put forward for its creation following Italian unification. The reason why we analyse the preparatory processes which led to the institution of the controversial Agrarian Enquiry is twofold. Firstly, to show that ever since the creation of the unified nation, two different approaches were used in addressing economic and social issues: the first guided by the interests of landed property and the conditions of the landowners, the second by the ‘social question’ involving the working class, which was also emerging in this period in other European countries and which principally considered the conditions of the agricultural working

class. These two approaches, already present for nearly a decade before the beginning of the Enquiry, sometimes coexisted in attempts to reconcile them, and sometimes remained in clear conflict. The final solution decided on consisted in unifying, what had become over the years two different Enquiries, into one with a double objective: the first regarding landowners and the economic and political interests of the landed property, the second referring mainly to the conditions of the working class in the countryside. As the representatives of the landed interests were the majority in the Italian Parliament both during the ‘Historical Right’ government from 1861 to 1876 and in the Left Government period which followed, it is easy to understand why the landowners were able to impose their point of view on the agrarian question for the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The second reason for considering the pre-Agrarian Enquiry period is to show a continuity in the various discussions that took place, of some important protagonists among whom were Agostino Bertani and Emilio Morpurgo, the *rapporteurs* of the future Investigations in the Italian Regions of Liguria and the Veneto.

The motivations at the root of the Enquiry were the economic changes underway at that moment which were rapidly transforming the relations between the landed property owners and farm workers. The owners, on the one hand, were putting forward to Governments in which they were still dominant requests of a political nature in contrast to those made by a growing industrial sector which was also well represented in Parliament. On the other hand, heavy pressure also came from some categories of agricultural labour forces nearer to the industrial workers with whom they shared the same demands and social battles.

The Enquiries of a general nature like the one presented here, were preceded or accompanied by enquiries promoted at a ministerial level into the conditions in agriculture and also by discussions on agrarian contracts, in particular the *mezzadrile* (sharecropping) system which appeared to offer a refuge from the social divisions which plagued the countryside, and the towns as well, in the years 1870–80 (Biagioli, 2002: 65–66).

This Enquiry, backed by the big land holders, was conducted on the pages of the Georgofili, the oldest Italian Agrarian Academy and is almost coeval to a similar initiative undertaken in France by the Société des Agriculteurs de France which advanced the same interests voiced in Italy (see the final results in Tourdonnet, 1879–80).

Understanding the long course of the Enquiry at the Parliamentary level and its complexities is necessary to appreciate not only the great variety of information it offers to historians, but also the contradictions and contrasts between different

intents. The interests of the land owners prevailed, and this greatly limited the impact the results could have on the policies followed in Parliament in the years to come.

As the Enquiry was implemented, its Commissioners were nominated, their roles were set out and their collaborators were selected, but no information about these is known. The collaborators were responsible for a great part of the information available in the Enquiry and they also fulfilled the role of authors of the Monographs, which often constitute the most interesting contents of the volumes.

## **I. A unique history for ‘two’ Enquiries**

A few days after the law establishing the Commission for an ‘Agrarian Enquiry on agriculture and the conditions of the agricultural class’, the King nominated the twelve members of the ‘Giunta’ (Commission). The President was Stefano Jacini, from whom the Enquiry derived its commonly used name, the ‘Jacini Enquiry’. Jacini belonged to a rich bourgeois family (he received the title of Count only in 1880) owning a large farm and a prosperous flax and silk spinning factory in Lombardy. He frequented, in his youth, the Fellenberg agricultural institute at Hofwyl, graduated in law and continued his studies in Vienna. Like many other members of the wealthy landed gentry, he then undertook the traditional Grand Tour through Europe, which led him to include the social problems of the agricultural working class in his sphere of economic, social and cultural interests. In 1854 Jacini published a book on the economic and moral conditions of the Lombard agricultural population (Jacini, 1854). Its second edition in 1856 was translated in German and made him very well known in Europe (Betri, 1998). In 1859–60 Cavour called him to be Minister of Public Works of the Kingdom of Sardinia; he had the same charge after the unification of Italy in the Lamarmora and Ricasoli cabinets, promoting road and railway development. He became a Deputy and then from 1870 Senator of the Kingdom (Raponi, 2004). His nomination as President of the ‘Giunta’ for the Agrarian Enquiry, is most probably related to his experience on both sides of the Enquiry, which, as we will see, had the aim of combining the interests of Italian landowners and the rural working class.

The Enquiry was preceded by a long political debate, within and outside Parliament, not on the necessity of the Enquiry (everybody was convinced of it) but on its execution.

Behind the law there was in fact a long period of preparation and discussions, officially starting in 1869. A few years had passed since the unification of the country,

with the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in March 1861. In 1866, the third war of independence brought into the new State the territories of Veneto and Friuli, previously under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1870, Rome and Latium were also conquered, thus nearly completing the patriotic *Risorgimento* project.

A decade after the unification process, and following the bloody war against brigandage in the Southern regions and the complicated administrative, financial and political problems that the new State had to face, the Italian Government and the political parties had to deal with the awakening of public opinion on many subjects, among which was the desire for economic growth. It also had to respond to the rising so-called ‘social issue’ in the newly formed nation. In the first years after the unification of the country, the agrarian interests had refused any involvement in the economic policy of the government. The ‘Historical Right (wing)’ in charge of the government was principally involved in the balancing of the State budget through strong fiscal pressure, based more on indirect than direct taxation. There was no consideration of the effects of such a taxation policy neither on the already marked regional economic and social inequalities nor on the different classes in society. However, from the late 1860s, the landowners began to change their attitude. Through their newly organised associations, they raised their voice to claim strong help from the Government in favour of agricultural interests and identified the Ministry of Agriculture as the institution which should provide mediation between their interests and those who were claiming more intervention on the ‘social issue’.

The leading political party and the government – many of whose ministers were landowners – could not ignore the requests of the landowners and more generally of the agrarian associations and interests. At the same time, there was increasing awareness that no serious action could be undertaken without a wide enquiry, covering the whole Italian territory, into agricultural conditions: social questions on one side, agricultural (mainly landowners’) interests on the other. Here are the origins of the duality of the agrarian enquiries leading, in the end, to the Jacini Enquiry. Up to then, very few studies had been realised, and on a local or a regional basis they were mainly the result of private initiatives, as in the case of Jacini for Lombardy. The Minister of Agriculture tried on many occasions to collect statistics and information on local economic conditions, but a good result was obtained only in 1868 when a circular posing twelve questions and based on the example of many foreign enquiries was sent to all the Agrarian *Comizi*. The *Comizi*, officially set up by the Ricasoli Government in 1865, were:

[...] voluntary associations of landowners, under the authority of both the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce and the Prefect and had

the task of spreading the best agricultural practices and of passing on to the Ministry information or requests which would be useful for the good management of the national agriculture (Banti, 1996: 83).

The questions included issues concerning land mobility, disposable capital, movements of day labourers, and the quantity and quality of agricultural production.<sup>1</sup> On this occasion the Minister collected a consistent number of answers, even though rough and incomplete, from the *Comizi*. All the collected documents were analysed by an expert in the field named Gaetano Cantoni, a medical doctor and patriot of the Italian *Risorgimento* who later went on to become a famous agronomist (Pazzagli 2008). Cantoni had been a lieutenant of Carlo Cattaneo during the Five days of insurgency of Milan in 1848 against the Austrian Empire. At the end of the insurrection he emigrated from Italy to Switzerland. In 1859 he was back in Milan where, two years later, he was appointed by the corporation 'Agrarian Association of Corte del Palasio' Director of the Agrarian High School. In his 'Report to the Minister', he grouped the answers received into eleven agrarian regions, defined according to either the topographical conditions or to the moral and civil traditions: Alto Po, Lombardy, Venice, Liguria, Emilia, the Marches, Etruria, Adriatic Southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia. The results of this report, considered as the first serious enquiry into Italian agricultural conditions, provided the foundations for the famous 'Report on the condition of agriculture 1870–1874', the very first attempt at a general analysis of the conditions of Italian agriculture, published in 1876.

In 1869, the Agricultural Council, created in the previous year to support the institutional tasks of the Ministry of Agriculture, discussed a project of the new Minister, Marco Minghetti, for the establishment of an Enquiry on the conditions of agricultural production and producers. A Commission was formed within the Council; one of its members was Emilio Morpurgo, whose name and actions will strongly emerge later on during the Jacini Enquiry. A year later, the Commission presented to the Council a very detailed Questionnaire, which focused on the economic conditions of agrarian production and landholders (Caracciolo, 1973: 6), while leaving aside the problems concerning peasants and agricultural workers. It was, therefore, not a social enquiry, but had a political and economic character, promoted by the interests of land owners, which were also expressed by newly constituted organisations of private stakeholders such as the Italian Agricultural Society, the Agrarian *Comizi* (from the Roman *Comitia*, Assemblies), and the wine-growers or wheat and rice producers' associations.

<sup>1</sup> 'Annali di Agricoltura', 1867–69, part i, pag. 3.

While the agrarian enquiry, as intended and proposed by the powerful class of landowners, was being prepared, a second idea of enquiry again came on the scene. In the country social unrest was growing, socialist ideas were spreading among the working classes, the agricultural day labourers formed their unions, and strikes and protests mounted. In 1869 a series of riots exploded in the whole country against the unpopular indirect tax imposed on milled cereals and other flours. It was the first united protest of the Italian rural masses. The disorders were repressed by the Army, but on the left wing as well as among moderates, concern over the 'social issue' remained. The European and Italian events of the following year, 1870, widened the perception of the problems posed by the condition of the working class. In June 1870 a Commission was created to study the possibility and terms of an enquiry into this question and a report was published at the end of 1871. In this document the *rapporteur*, Giuseppe Guerzoni, an Italian patriot, follower, biographer and secretary of Giuseppe Garibaldi, started from the existence in the country of a *questione sociale*, particularly in agriculture, which had to be solved in order to safeguard social cohesion. The Commission had prepared a detailed plan for the enquiry, going from the demographic, economic, physical and sanitary conditions (dwellings, food, salaries, contracts, strikes) to those involving intellectual and moral issues (level of instruction, relationship with the landowners). Special attention was to be given to the agricultural working class, and particularly to women and child labour.

The Guerzoni report was the starting point of a bill presented by the Left, which represented the opposition in Parliament. The initiative was taken in December 1871 by Agostino Bertani. Bertani, a medical doctor, was one of the leaders of the Italian Risorgimento, a friend of Giuseppe Mazzini and of Carlo Cattaneo. He joined the 1848 insurrection of the Five Days of Milan against Austrian domination and from then on organised assistance to the wounded volunteers and soldiers in nearly all the wars of independence on the peninsula. He was one of the Garibaldi Mille and was elected in 1861 to the Italian Parliament from the Left party. After 1870 and the conquest of Rome he became the leader of the extreme parliamentary Left. Besides his intervention in the Agrarian Enquiry, he backed the abolition of the tax on milled cereals and universal suffrage, and as a deputy always paid special attention to public hygiene and education. His introduction of the bill calling for an Enquiry into the conditions of the agricultural working class was joined by fifty members of parliament, among whom were very famous politicians such as Cairoli and Francesco Crispi, who later on became an important Prime Minister, as well as a few landowners (Caracciolo, 1973: 16–17). The concern about the 'social issue' was not, however, an exclusive patrimony of the Left. The 'southernist' Pasquale Villari, belonging to the Right, in his intervention in Parliament invited the Assembly to put

the social and moral conditions of the peasants at the core of the enquiry. Villari, a Neapolitan historian and liberal deputy, in his 'Southern Letters' written in 1875 contributed to create the 'southernist' school of thought that from the end of the nineteenth century denounced the Italian economic dualism between an advanced North and a backward South as a problem of lack of cohesion into the national state and as a possible cause of the state's dissolution. Some of the most influential writers and politicians believed that this dualism originated in an economic 'robbery' by the Italian government of Southern resources to the advantage of the Northern regions (Nitti, 1900). But it was the position of a minority in the conservative camp. On many occasions in the Parliamentary debates what emerged was the preoccupation that an enquiry into the conditions of the working class would produce a rise in expectations for social reforms, which, if unfulfilled, would have very dangerous consequences in terms of social unrest and political instability. The same argument was, on many occasions, repeated in official speeches during the whole period of the Jacini Enquiry.

From 1871 to 1873 the preparation of the first enquiry, based on the landowners' point of view, continued, but in the end, the two Commissions at work agreed on a unified report and a single bill. After further discussions and changes aimed to weaken its social character, the 'Agrarian Enquiry on the conditions of the agricultural class' was approved by the Chamber of Deputies on the 15th of March 1877, some months after the defeat of the Right following the elections of 1876 and the formation of a government by the Left.

## **II. The 'Giunta' for the Agrarian Enquiry**

A Royal Decree, a few days after the decision of the Chamber of Deputies, nominated 12 members of the 'Giunta' (the Committee), one-third elected by the Senate, one-third by the Chamber of Deputies and one-third appointed by the Government. All drawn from the Italian Parliament, they were Giuseppe Angeloni, Agostino Bertani, Carlo Berti Pichat, Ascanio Branca, Abele Damiani, Fedele De Siervo, Pietro Fossa, Stefano Jacini, Emilio Morpurgo, Francesco Salaris, Giuseppe Toscanelli, Francesco Nobili Vitelleschi. After the death of Fossa and Berti Pichat, Francesco Meardi and Luigi Tanari took their place. For this reason, we should not refer to this initiative as one taken by Parliament, but as a mixed governmental and parliamentary enquiry. The composition of the Giunta reveals a majority of the parliamentary Left, but three members of the Right were among the most important figures, particularly Stefano Jacini who had been the President of the Agricultural Council and became President of the Giunta, Emilio Morpurgo and Nobili Vitelleschi; moreover, not only the members of the Right, but also the majority of those from the



Left in the Giunta were rich landowners. This is why the ‘social issue’ did not become a central theme. All the members, except Bertani and the Sicilian Damiani, were in favour of an agrarian enquiry into the situation of landed property and agricultural production; in other words, a political and technical enquiry rather than a social one. An attempt was made by Bertani to split the tasks among the members, in accordance with their background and studies, by creating a series of sub-commissions, but the majority of the Giunta and President Jacini declared that all the problems should be considered together for a better analysis of their complexity. It was only by resigning that Bertani eventually gained a compromise: all the sectors of the Enquiry were to be treated by each commissioner, but the medical doctor – deputy was assigned an investigation with considerable freedom of action into the hygienic conditions of the Italian peasant. This was nearly the only surviving official approach to the ‘social issue’, even though some social problems of the agricultural working class were shifted into the Bertani enquiry.

The work of the Commissioners was supposed to have been completed in two years. In fact, the time span was eventually much longer, that is, from April 1877 to April 1885. It was the first and only general Parliamentary Enquiry for the whole of Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century.

According to Jacini’s suggestion, the Italian territory was divided into twelve Districts, chosen more in accordance with political than agrarian criteria. Each District was assigned to one of the members of the Giunta, many of whom had already had experience with regional studies within the borders of the pre-unified States. Moreover, the President, Jacini, had been a promoter, as part of the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, of a series of reports regarding agricultural conditions in Italy, including the above-mentioned ‘Report on the period 1870–75’, already organised by Districts. Each District was assigned to the Commissioner coming from its territory; this meant that the choice of the members of the Giunta had been made in expectation of the future steps of the Enquiry.

In May 1877 a Programme-questionnaire was also published to guide the work of the Commissioners. Its structure had two initial preliminary titles, the first on soil and climate and the second on population, followed by core headings: on agriculture and agrarian products (with 220 subheadings), on land property (with 95 subheadings), on the relationship between landowners and peasants (26 subheadings) and, finally, on the conditions of the agricultural workers (46 subheadings). The accent was therefore mostly on the problems of landed property. In December 1877, the Depretis-Crispi left wing government cabinet decided on the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade. This event produced a sort of earthquake among landowners and



their representatives in Parliament, and in their organisations, the Agrarian Comitia, and the Giunta for the agrarian enquiry. President Jacini resigned as a protest against the government's decision. In 1878 the Ministry was re-established, the Giunta returned to work after a prolonged interruption and obtained more time and money to bring its tasks to an end.

The following years, the second half of 1879, 1880 and 1881 represented the central and determining period for the activity of the Giunta. Up to then many Commissioners had paid very little or no attention to their duties, which attracted protests from Jacini and criticism from the political press. Only two years after the approval of the Enquiry did some results arrive in the form of documents from the District Committees and local monographs of the winners of the competitions which assigned them this task. In the meantime, Agostino Bertani tried to organise a counter-enquiry into the issues he still had in mind on the conditions of agricultural workers. Counting on the support of the head of the government cabinet, Depretis, his old companion in arms during the Risorgimento period, he defied his colleagues in the Giunta (Caracciolo, 1973: 56–57) but his attempts in the end failed to assure him a thematic and financial autonomy. He was finally forced to return, with humiliating letters, under the official umbrella of Jacini to get some urgently needed money.

### **III. Between the State and private citizens: the interlocutors of the enquiry for collecting information**

The instruments adopted for the enquiry were different, eclectic and, on the whole, without an adequate methodological base. For instance, in the first sitting of the Giunta Giuseppe Toscanelli, a Tuscan landlord who had been appointed Commissioner for the Ninth District, suggested the adoption, for the Enquiry, of the criteria of homogeneous agrarian zones instead of administrative districts, the second criteria being simpler but of less significance from a methodological point of view (*Atti della Giunta*, 1883: 145 segg.). It is important to underline that Toscanelli and Jacini were the only two members in the Giunta to have also been authors of a private enquiry into the conditions of the agricultural sector and of the peasants in their regions. Toscanelli's book (Toscanelli, 1861) which he presented at the first national exposition of 1861 in Florence, is an important document of the Pisan rural world, especially regarding owner income and the life of the peasants, with the tools of their work designated in the appendix (Barsanti, 2005). Jacini and a few other members of the Commission were in favour of Toscanelli's proposal, but they did not succeed in getting it adopted. Toscanelli resigned. Only in the following century, after some

further enquiries and progress in the national and international methodological tools used, was Toscanelli's suggestion adopted by the National Institute of agrarian economy (Tolaini, 2005: 65).

The Giunta tried, at the beginning of its work, to get what, especially in terms of statistics, could already be found, as worked out by public bodies, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce. Thanks to this procedure, many volumes of the Proceedings have statistical tables: one for Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, the Veneto, the Marches, Sicily. Other data, like those on the distribution of land ownership, were provided by the Revenue Office but are very scant. In many pre-unification States, in fact, especially in the South, geometric parcel cadastral mapping had never been carried out and there was no possibility of correctly establishing either the size or the income of landed property in the names of individual taxpayers. In addition, the organisation of State statistical services was still scant, given the recent unification of the country and a very disparate history in this area in the pre-unification States. Thus, in some cases, such as the Veneto, the Commissioner decided not to use some official statistics, like those regarding agricultural production, considering them too uncertain.

A second approach, undertaken by the *rapporteur* Stefano Jacini to overcome the poor training of his collaborators, was that of a competition, with prize money, which called upon all individuals interested in the initiative to submit monographs. There was no specific reference to figures and categories eligible for the initiative.

Another attempt to gather information was that of sending out detailed questionnaires – they were different according to the category to which they were directed – in order to obtain first-hand information. The addressees were the Agrarian *Comizi*, the other agricultural associations, the mayors, the magistrates, district doctors, chambers of commerce, the prefectures, revenue offices, and the relevant committees created in the different administrative divisions (districts, provinces). For example, the questionnaire sent to the magistrates' courts contained twenty questions concerning the moral and material conditions of the rural classes and social relations in the country areas. The subjects covered by the questions included the strength of family ties, of religious feeling, deviant behaviour (illegitimate births, prostitution), respect for other people's property and the tenant farmers' obligations towards the landowner, as well as the possible behavioural differences between sharecroppers and farm labourers.

The last of the instruments employed by some commissioners was that of personal inspections. Stefano Jacini in Lombardy, like Abele Damiani in Sicily,

used similar methods for their work in the areas entrusted to them. In fact, Jacini went to all the provincial capitals in Lombardy, contacting the prefects, the Agrarian ‘Comizi’, the local authorities and some private citizens. He achieved notable success with the submission, at the competition announced by the Giunta, of many provincial monographs. In Sicily, Commissioner Damiani carried out personal inspections himself in all the Sicilian provincial capitals. However, he did not succeed in setting up provincial commissions to collect data. Therefore, he also decided, like Jacini, to rely upon the competition organized by the Giunta in order to obtain monographs which offered a starting point for preparing reports. The data from the monographs were assembled by seeking the help of the local offices of the State administration, although there is no trace of their responses. Damiani also sent out the detailed questionnaires, already referred to, like the one for the mayors about agricultural conditions and the one to the magistrates. Many of the replies have remained in the archives of the Enquiry. The same procedure was used by Francesco Meardi, the Commissioner for Piedmont: instead of setting up local committees, Meardi personally went to the various districts, directly contacting the Agrarian *Comizi* and private citizens, whose replies he then utilised in his report.

#### IV. The results of the Agrarian Enquiry: the printed documents

At the end of the Enquiry, as already said, fifteen volumes in twenty-two tomes were printed. The first volume was dedicated to an introduction by the President on the agrarian problem in Italy and to the Enquiry; the last, again by Jacini, was the most famous and well-known document of the Enquiry, the ‘Final Report’ of the President and a Synoptic-Analytical Index of all the documents of the Enquiry.<sup>2</sup> The first results were printed in 1882, the last in 1885. On May 1, 1885, President Jacini communicated to Parliament the dissolution of the Commission nominated eight years earlier. The Enquiry, after so many doubts not only among its opponents, but also among its supporters, was finished, leaving as a heritage a library of research on agrarian Italy. Omitting the various introductions, the printed documents surpassed 12,000 pages. The most consistent blocks of pages and documents were related to Lombardy (Commissioner Stefano Jacini, vol. VI, 2 tomes, 1,528 p.), Sicily (Commissioner Abele Damiani, vol. XIII, 2 tomes, 1,456 p.), Piedmont (Commissioner Francesco Meardi, vol. VIII, 2 tomes, 1,405 p.) and the three regions Lazio, Umbria and the Marches with Tuscan Grosseto included (Commissioner Marchese Francesco Nobili Vitelleschi, vol. XI, 2 tomes, 2,022 p.). The non-agrarian

<sup>2</sup> All the documents are now in the Archivio centrale dello Stato of Rome. See Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali, *L'archivio della Giunta per l'inchiesta agraria e sulle condizioni della classe agricola in Italia (inchiesta Jacini) 1877–1885*. Inventario.

but historical and political reasons which were sometimes behind the organisation of the ‘Circoscrizioni’ (Districts) is particularly evident in the case of the Lazio, Umbria and Marche districts. Among the three regions, there were very different situations between Lazio on one hand, and Marche and Umbria on the other, in terms of property structure, agrarian systems organisation, agrarian contracts, going from the Latium absentee latifundium based on an extensive agriculture and sheep breeding to the prevailing sharecropping intensive system based on family farms of Umbria and Marche. The only reason to keep them together seems to have been their belonging together, until 1861, to the Pontifical State.

Each volume begins with a Report by the nominated Commissioner, with the exception of Volume 3 for Tuscany. In the case of Tuscany, after the resignation of Giuseppe Toscanelli, his place was taken by another Tuscan Deputy, Carlo Massimiliano Mazzini, the secretary of Jacini in the Enquiry.

In many cases the Commissioners made two reports, either on the general conditions of land property and productions or on the conditions of the peasants. The two reports were more frequent in the different parts of the Districts which were organised into groups of provinces or *circondari* (sub-districts). The Reports were followed by a series of Monographs chosen from those entered in the competitions held by the Giunta to collect and analyse data on a regional and sub-district level, or based on special issues (viti-viniculture, drainage, emigration and so on). Many of the prepared Monographs were not published and are still in the Archives of the Giunta; some have been published in the last decades, as in the case of the Veneto Region (Lazzarini, 1983).

## **V. The informants of the Commissioners and the authors of the Monographs**

To evaluate the reliability of the Agrarian Enquiry as a documentary source we must not only know the Commissioners, their background and competence, but also their informants and the authors of the monographs, collected documents, and statistical compilations. Sometimes their scientific background is absolutely clear, as in the case of the famous agrarian entrepreneur and agronomist Domenico Lampertico (Fumian, 1984: 118–141) who reported the systems of cultivation and production in the Vicenza province, or Enrico Paglia (Caleffi, 2006: 169–175), agronomist and naturalist, author of a Monograph on the Mantua province, or in the health field with the information provided to Bertani by many medical doctors. Generally speaking, in any case, the informants and those who participated in the competitions were not

scientists; they were local representatives of the middle class at the head of the local administration and economic life, or members of the Agrarian Comitia; some were technicians or government officials, like the prefects.

The monographs presented varied in number and comprehensiveness depending upon the region, but in many cases they prove to be an important source of information and detailed knowledge of local conditions, which were so diverse in a young nation like Italy, with so many 'agricultural Italys', as appropriately defined by Jacini himself in his Final Report. As has already been said, the competition was open to everyone; and the range of the authors of the monographs was not uniformly restricted to landed property, even if the landowners, more or less well-off, constituted the largest group whose family origin and total assets could be traced. Generally, they were not ordinary landowners, but 'enlightened landowners', 'notables' of the country as many of them are defined, for the Veneto, by Lazzarini. Even if some of them were nobles, they did not belong to the great land-owning class, which had its representatives in Parliament. They were country 'notables', belonging to what could be defined, in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a middling bourgeoisie, originating from agricultural, merchant or professional backgrounds, which, in any case, had a knowledge of the agricultural world. For many of the writers of the monographs this knowledge did not reach a professional level.

Twelve of the authors of the monographs are known as experts in agronomy, three as agricultural economists. In this last category, on closer inspection, one can also find two other figures, who, however, did not present monographs, but who concerned themselves with drawing up the reports, and subsequently became much more famous than they had been at the time of the Agricultural Enquiry. The first was Ghino Valenti, who at that time was President of the Agrarian *Comizio* of Macerata and, as such, drew up the report on the Marches. In the *Introduction* to his 'Studies of Agrarian Politics' Valenti presents his collaboration with Jacini as a decisive step in his career both for the field of his studies, which then turned to the agrarian economy, and for the adoption of the positivist method. At the death of his father, a magistrate, he devoted himself to managing his inherited lands which he tried to make more profitable through investing in important improvements, but with scant financial success, so much so that he was forced to seek another source of income by taking up a university career (Guidi, 2001: 327–356). Subsequently he opened a school of agricultural economics and was also in charge of the office of agricultural statistics, from 1911 to 1914, in the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce. The other agricultural economist destined to become famous was Vittorio Stringher, a physician, collaborator of Commissioner Abele Damiani in drawing up the excellent and complex report on Sicily.

Among the agronomists we find names which present, as in other cases, professional expertise intertwined with interests and behaviour inspired by liberal or democratic political ideas. Among them was Attilio Magri, the son of a capitalist tenant farmer and a tenant farmer himself, who had taken part in the uprising of 1848 in Mantua; he had travelled for a long time in the Europe of the Industrial Revolution, which he saw as an example for Italy. At the time of the Enquiry he was in charge of the Agrarian *Comizio* of Mantua, to whose environs his monograph is dedicated. The author of a farmer's catechism and of many works about agricultural credit, he was also a man of letters and a writer. Another interesting figure is Baron Giuseppe Andrea Angeloni, from Abruzzo, who, following the family tradition, devoted himself to studying economics, agronomy and social sciences. In his youth he had joined the movement for Italian Unity at the side of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Among the authors of monographs who practiced a profession there were eight engineers, as well as the entire body of engineers of Latium and nine lawyers. However, the most important figures among the professional men, besides the agronomists, were the physicians, who were also the most 'dissenting' in relation to the documentation provided by the enquiry and by its official conclusions: not only, therefore, in regard to what can justifiably be called Bertani's 'counter-enquiry'.

Besides the official *rapporteurs*, we find in the Records thirteen other authors or co-authors of monographs; they were mainly district doctors, to whom questionnaires were often sent, or were part of health districts in the Veneto, Tuscany, Latium, Campania, Abruzzo and Calabria. Some were also concerned with agronomy or agriculture and were in the Agrarian *Comizi*. Among them we find Antonio Bottoni, a democrat from Ferrara, who in 1870 enrolled, with the rank of Captain doctor, in Garibaldi's expedition to France. In Paris he offered his services to the Commune, collecting notes and documents for an account of those events, which however he never wrote. He was the doctor on board a ship heading to the Dutch East Indies, an experience he described in a book in which he disapproved of the methods of Dutch imperialism, which he thought were destined to provoke anti-European reaction in the subject peoples. After having also taken a journey to America, he won a place as a doctor in the Province of Siena, writing a monograph about the area in which he was practicing. A third interesting figure was Alfonso Ademollo, the author of a prize-winning monograph about the Province of Grosseto. The son of a famous painter, he took part in the 1848 uprising in Tuscany. A writer and eclectic scholar of medicine and the sciences, the author of notes on cholera in the Maremma in 1855 and of a Maremma Ornithology, he ended his career as Royal Inspector of excavations and monuments.

Among the replies to the detailed questionnaires, those from the Agrarian *Comizi* were particularly important. These associations were extremely useful in several ways: from among their members, they provided the authors of many of the monographs, and they assisted in the gathering of the information requested, sometimes on the occasion of the direct visits by some Commissioners. The Agrarian *Comizi* proved to be particularly important for the Centre-North of Italy, while they do not appear to have played any role in Apulia, the rest of the South of Italy and the islands.

On the whole, the perspective of those who participated in producing the monographs and of the Agrarian *Comizi* was quite accurate in illustrating local systems of cultivation or agrarian contracts, as well as, to a certain extent, the living conditions of the working class. The information on the number of landowners, the land distribution and the quantity of production is, on the contrary, very dubious. In this last case the landowners were definitely not interested in giving information: from the beginning they feared the Enquiry was a fiscal tool to increase the land tax and were hostile to letting Parliament and the Government know the real land income. But, above all, their vision was strictly conditioned by their social status which was very biased and ‘partisan’ in relation to the social issues. Of course, this was not always the case. We have already mentioned Bertani’s attitude in this field and his contrast with Jacini, which lasted up to the official final documents of the Enquiry. But even the report on the peasants and agricultural day labourers in the Veneto, signed by Emilio Morpurgo,<sup>3</sup> was so blunt that the local landowners and Agrarian Comitia overwhelmed it with protests; as Lazzarini wrote, ‘that very meek moderate [...] was assaulted by the press and even in Parliament as if he were the most extreme socialist.’ To the attacks, Morpurgo replied:

[...] go, see and then report on the beauty of the rural houses, on the sufficient salaries, tell us that the complaints of the victims of pellagra, of the emigrants, of the day labourers are untrue, that the lack of food is untrue, the lack of water untrue. (Lazzarini, 1983: 12–13).

In fact, the Veneto was the poorest part of Northern Italy up to the middle of the twentieth century. One of the Italian Regions nowadays politically dominated by the Lega Nord, with its anti-immigration programme, it was for centuries a land of poor, mass migrants.

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<sup>3</sup> See Vol. IV, Circonscrizione XI.



## **VI. The complicated history of a freshly unified territory. Was there already a North–South difference?**

As has been said before, the Enquiry was an extraordinary opportunity to understand the complexity of the Italian peninsula, which was unified for the first time since the Roman Empire and not even at the same time for the whole of the territory. The Veneto entered after the Third War of Independence in 1866; Rome in 1870; the region of Trentino-Alto Adige in 1918, having previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Italy as a nation even within the 1861 boundaries was a very new State, after centuries of separation between regional States sometimes independent, but in many cases, from the Early Modern Era to the nineteenth century, dominated by Spain, France, or Austria. The economic and social history of unified Italy must therefore deal with a history of separation among the different local administrations, different economic systems, etc., and their effects after unification.

The results of the Enquiry and the words used by Stefano Jacini in his definition of the peninsula as a collection of many agricultural Italys offer the best evaluation possible of nineteenth-century reality. There are profound differences between regions in post-unified Italy, in terms of local agriculture as well as in more general terms of economic growth. The classical dichotomy between North-South is inadequate; there were underdeveloped areas and poverty in the North, particularly in the Veneto, just as there was an advanced and well-structured agriculture in the South, for instance, in some areas of Puglia and Sicily. Nevertheless, the great part of the South as it emerges from the Enquiry seemed to suffer from greater structural deficiencies, endogenous to the agricultural sector and production as a whole, with respect to the Centre-North of the country. The system of agriculture in the South was often based on the precarious and mobile labour of peasants who had established their abode far from the countryside and moved from place to place in search of work. This was the case not only in areas dedicated to cereals, as it happened in the North, where resort was made to hired labour for sowing and reaping, but also in the specialised vine and citrus growing areas. Bevilacqua introduced the definition ‘migrant agricultures’ (Bevilacqua, 1985: 199) for Calabria where there existed a reality in which the landowners, in the majority of cases, were unable to organise their property in unique farming enterprises, but always hired a temporary labour force. The intermediation between the owners and the workers seeking work took various forms. Whereas in Lombardy’s high farming the tenant invested capital in the productive cycle, in the Sicilian latifundia in which the name ‘feudo’ still survived long after the abolishment of the feudal régime, the *gabellotto* was a simple intermediary who did not make

any investment himself and who obtained his profit from the difference between the rent he had to pay for the land and the returns he obtained from the hired workers, sharecroppers or very small sub-tenants.

The conditions of the farmers without their own land or with too little land to serve family needs were worse in the South than in the Centre-North and it is this geographical difference which was the most egregious. One example will suffice to illustrate this:

The Tuscan *mezzadro* and the Sicilian *metatiere* were both sharecroppers with little or no working capital of their own. The *mezzadro* received from the landowner without any payment, a farming enterprise which was ready to cultivate, a house for himself and his family who worked the whole year on the farm, an advance on the seeds to be sowed, which was then recovered from the following harvest, and the draft cattle as well as pigs and a small flock of sheep. No interest was asked by the landowner for all these advances. The products were divided in half (Biagioli, 2002: 54–58). The infrastructure (mostly roads, later on railways) was considerable and a great part of the population, agricultural and not, was occupied in a circuit of proto-industrial activities or modern industry which created additional family income.

In contrast, the *metatiere* received one third of the production, with two-thirds going to the *gabellotto* or land owner. From the one-third he received, the *metatiere* had to deduct the payment for seeds as well as other advances, like those received by the *mezzadro*, on which he had to pay an interest rate as high as 20–25% (Ierardi, 2002). Inevitably, this kind of Sicilian small farmer was forced to incur substantial debts. His family's income was also reduced as a result of the fact that women were not allowed to work in most of the Sicilian countryside. The crisis of sericulture and the absence of manufacturing of any scale on the island meant that employment depended almost entirely on agriculture and the sulphur mines. This situation was aggravated by the presence of a multitude of intermediaries above the producer, which led to a further limitation of the revenue of the *gabellotto* or of the landowner himself, despite the production of a fertile and specialised agriculture.

From what has been reported above, it is no surprise that the first waves of emigration from Italy in the last decades of the nineteenth century, shortly after the end of the Enquiry, came from the Veneto in the North and Calabria and Sicily in the South.

The Enquiry expressed the most advanced orientations of the Italian Parliament either in the field of the agrarian world gravitating around the landlord's interests, or among the supporters of the political world that from Unification onwards neglected the most important issues in favour of agrarian development. The opinions expressed by Stefano Jacini in his final report singled out the main critical points in the Italian

agrarian situation at that time: the relative decline of Italian agriculture in the last 30–40 years before the Enquiry as compared with other Northern European countries, the consciousness of the peasants of their miserable conditions, particularly if compared to other European peasants; the necessity to improve the peasants' economic and social situation; the errors in the new State's agrarian politics (inefficient system for the sale of common land, too heavy taxation, the necessity of adopting for all Italian agriculture a more intensive, capitalist culture based on the example of the Northern Italy). Unfortunately, when Jacini published his Report, there was another dominating issue at the heart of the political debates, inside and outside the Italian Parliament, the agrarian crisis, mostly caused by the well-known international fall in the price of cereals. In reaction to this, the Parliamentary majority adopted an agrarian protectionism whose aim was to satisfy the interests of all the grain producing areas, both from the North and from the South of the country, and of all their representatives in the Italian Parliament. The industrial interests were not neglected either by the new protectionist legislation. This North–South deal marked the end of any possibility of changing by Parliament Italian agrarian history.

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See also the University of Cagliari degree thesis, Academic Year 1995–1996, on the site <http://web.gioder.altervista.org/jacini/index.php>

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