

Graevenitz, Fritz Georg von: *Argument Europa. Internationalismus in der globalen Agrarkrise der Zwischenkriegszeit (1927–1937)*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 2017. ISBN: 978-3-593-50699-9; 470 S.

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In the last twenty years or so, the concept of internationalism has become central to our understanding of the period between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century. Historians have described multiple facets of transnational cooperation and exchange over social, economic and political issues and they have shown how the emergence of an internationalist sphere shaped and was shaped by nationalist ideas and politics.¹ Within this historiography, however, the international response to the social and economic challenges faced by an increasingly globalized rural economy, has received comparatively little attention. Georg von Graevenitz's study of how the recurrence of agricultural crises in the late nineteenth century gave rise to new international interest groups who promoted cooperation across borders and the search for international economic policy measures is therefore a timely contribution to the historiography of internationalism.

Based on a PhD thesis submitted at the European University Institute in Florence in 2011, the book examines the mechanisms of agrarian internationalism and agricultural cooperation in the interwar years. It particularly focuses on how agrarian interest groups used the new international space and opportunities offered by the League of Nations to debate international agricultural economic policy measures. Georg von Graevenitz's study sets up a dialogue with recent books such as Patricia Clavin's encompassing history of the League of Nations' economic activities.² By placing agricultural trade at the centre of his investigation, von Graevenitz elaborates on the relationship between national and international spheres. The study also makes an important contribution to the new international history of agriculture that has emerged in recent years and has paid increased attention to the institu-

tional aspects of international agricultural cooperation.³

Through the concept of agrarian internationalism, Georg von Graevenitz reveals the existence of a multilayered space of international cooperation that emerged from the late nineteenth century onwards and became institutionalized with the creation of the League of Nations after the First World War. Based on thorough multiarchival research the book brings to the fore the activities of international associations and interest groups that have hitherto been largely ignored in the history of interwar international relations such as, for example, the Commission Internationale d'Agriculture, a body founded in 1889 as a self-declared 'Green International' that gained political momentum under the leadership of French minister Jules Méline, French landowner Louise Antoine de Vogüé and Swiss agronomist Ernst Laur. As von Georg von Graevenitz shows in the first few chapters of his book, through international commissions, correspondences and meetings, members of the Commission Internationale d'Agriculture elaborated a common line of action that aimed for the protection of European agricultural producers from the allegedly more competitive American farmer. The book's description of the identification of common economic interests as the beginning of a process of Europeanization is innovative and opens new ground for our understanding of the international order in the interwar years.

Georg von Graevenitz's study rightly suggests, however, that growing international

¹ See, for example, Emily Rosenberg (Hrsg.), *A World Connecting, 1870–1945*, Cambridge, MA 2012. Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Philadelphia 2013. Martin H. Geyer / Johannes Paulmann (Hrsg.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, Oxford 2001. Daniel Laqua (Hrsg.), *Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, New York 2011.

² Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Revention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946*, New York 2013.

³ See for example the set of articles edited by Juan Pan-Montojo and Niccolò Mignemi that deal with international organizations and agriculture between 1905 and 1945 in the *British Agriculture History Review* Volume 65, Number 2, December 2017.

cooperation was not just the outcome of an agrarian epistemic community fuelled by shared beliefs and common policy goals. Rather the situation was more complex, often seemingly paradoxical, in that individual actors not only belonged simultaneously to several national and international communities; they also used international platforms to promote protectionist policies. As von Graevenitz puts it: rather than being a sign of an increasing fragmentation and international economic and political crisis the promotion of national protectionist measures was a central aspect of agrarian internationalism (p. 393). Indeed, a valuable aspect of the book is that it does not shy away from discussing paradoxes such as this but firmly connects international processes to national backgrounds. Thus, von Graevenitz highlights the prominent place claimed by Fascist and National Socialist actors in international agrarian circles. He shows how in the second half of the 1920s, Italy's Fascist government engaged in a period of high internationalism that led to the foundation of 23 new organizations concerned with agricultural or rural questions. Similarly, von Graevenitz draws attention to the CIA's proximity with Nazi ideology of *Blut und Boden*, and thereby highlights how interwar agrarianism cut across partisan lines and ideologies.

In the last two chapters of his book, von Graevenitz applies his description of the mechanisms of agrarian internationalism to the study of two global commodities: sugar and wheat. The chapters trace the emergence of a common European agricultural policy *avant l'heure* and shed light on the entanglements of commercial interest groups, government representatives and international expert communities. Here the study goes beyond the interwar years to establish continuities and parallels with economic conferences after the Second World War. As a result the time frame is slightly confusing, especially as the economic impact of the Second World War is not taken into account.

Von Graevenitz's study is well researched and unearths a plethora of archival materials, actors and institutions that deserve a greater place in the international history of the interwar years. With 400 pages of dense narra-

tive, the book, however, is not an easy read. It is packed with information that sometimes would have benefited from greater unpacking. For example, the reader would have been eager to learn more about the motivations and world views of the architects of agrarian internationalism and to hear more about shared European ideas on the social and economic conceptualization of an international agricultural sphere. Similarly, certain passages of the book could have profited from more historical background and better contextualization of individual issues. In the discussion over wheat agreements, for example, there is only little reflection on the wider economic but also social stakes of organizing the international wheat trade and balancing production and consumption. Here it would have been useful to have a deeper analysis of the quantitative aspects of domestic production and the effects of wheat surpluses on national economies. Despite these shortcomings, the book will be of great interest to those interested in the history of the interwar economic order and the longue durée of European agricultural policy. The book will also appeal to scholars interested in the history of international institutions and especially in the history of the League of Nations.

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