

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 historiography, the development of economic globalization since the mid-19th century is often divided into three phases. The period of the first globalization was weakened significantly by the First World War and ended finally with the Great Depression of 1929-1933, which was followed by a period of de-globalization. After the Second World War, the entanglements in the global economy (at least in the so-called West) increased again and in the 1970s, a new surge in globalization took place. This narrative is supported by the quantitative development of important indicators of economic globalization, in particular, by data about foreign trade and capital flows. A good example is the trade in agricultural commodities such as wheat, rice, sugar and, sometimes, also meat. Truly global markets have emerged in these areas since the 1870s. Since the mid-1920s, there has been an interaction between overproduction, falling world market prices, and national protectionism. De-globalization was linked to an agricultural crisis in the exporting countries. In economic historical research, the answer to the question of the extent to which each of these factors was the cause or the effect of the agricultural crisis is controversial. However, there is consensus that all attempts at the international level to mitigate the agricultural crisis have completely failed.

Graevenitz's book offers a more nuanced picture. An important argument of the book is that the central element of internationalism in the global agricultural crisis between 1927 and 1937 was not global free trade propagated by international economic diplomacy but the invention of international market intervention. The author stresses that this development was not only tolerated but also actively promoted by national agricultural interest groups (p. 12). Therefore, since the mid-

1920s, the most important international debates have not been between protagonists of a liberal market, on the one hand, and advocates of protectionism and economic nationalism, on the other. These debates have more specifically been about international agreements on the quota for agricultural production or at least for foreign trade in agricultural goods. They have also dealt with contracts on regional levels that supplemented or increasingly replaced global agreements.

A number of reasons explain this development: a) structural peculiarities of agriculture, which led producers to react to market signals only with great delay, b) the radical changes in the markets caused by the First World War, which meant that after the war, Eastern European producers had to compete on Western Europe markets against farmers from the North and South America and from Australia, c) the growing influence of ideas of agrarianism. This ideology claims a specific position of agriculture and rural areas in the economy and society. Graevenitz only mentions this „exceptionalism“ in passing and deals with the processes on the agricultural markets relatively briefly.

Instead, he focuses on the impact of the agricultural crisis on the history of internationalism. In doing so, he analyses the development of the idea of a European tariff preference system and reconstructs the debates, the decisions, and the agreements produced at numerous conferences. Thus, his book is an important contribution to the history of European integration. It provides further evidence to the fact that already before the Second World War ideas and conceptions of European cooperation were developed not only by individual intellectuals and politicians but also by stakeholders that represented the interests of economic sectors or branches. Graevenitz clearly shows that the agricultural policy of the European Economic Community of the post-war era was not only a result of national agricultural protectionism but was also based on an internationalist tradition.

The main actors in Graevenitz's narrative are experts who worked in the departments and commissions of the League of Nations as well as leading representatives of the Commission Internationale d'Agriculture (CIA),

which had the function of a union of national agricultural associations and had growing influence on the League of Nations. The CIA prevailed against the International Agricultural Institute in Rome, which was increasingly dominated by the Italian fascist government. National measures to combat the agricultural crisis are not dealt with and the actions of national government representatives at these international meetings are only assigned a secondary role.

The fourth and the fifth chapters deal with the various attempts to solve the global grain crisis and to regulate the global sugar market. Here, many sections present some new facts. For example, we learn that there were important conferences in Stresa on Lake Maggiore not only in 1935 and 1958 but also already in 1932 which dealt with problems in European agriculture. Georges Bonnet, the head of the conference in 1932 and later French Minister of Foreign Affairs, called for „European solidarity“ to replace national selfishness. (pp. 254 f., 274-298) This „solidarity“ concerned the introduction of a system of tariff preferences that the European countries should grant each other. Ultimately, the project failed primarily due to the German-French opposition. However, the idea of tariff preferences within Europe developed by the Eastern European grain exporters became dominant in the agricultural policy debate at the international level during the great depression. Graevenitz repeatedly points to the great importance that Eastern European problems, ideologies, and concepts played in the CIA and, later, at the international conferences of the League of Nations, such as the London World Wheat Conference in 1933. Unfortunately, throughout the book, the Eastern European actors – unlike the Western Europeans and Americans ones – remain in the dark.

Overall, however, it is a great merit to clarify the importance of non-state actors in agrarian internationalism. These experts and stakeholders contributed significantly to the fact that markets were both restricted and survived by planning. They also further developed the idea of regional – in this case European – cooperation, which after World War II was to prove to be a strategy on the divided

continent that was more realistic and better for agriculture than the extreme positions of free trade, on the one side, and national protectionism, on the other.

Uwe Müller über Graevenitz, Fritz Georg von: *Argument Europa. Internationalismus in der globalen Agrarkrise der Zwischenkriegszeit (1927–1937)*. Frankfurt am Main 2017, in: H-Soz-Kult .