

The Agrarian History of Spain, 1800–1960*

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UNTIL the 1960s more Spaniards worked on the land than in either industry or the service sector. Yet for a variety of reasons, not least a dearth of reliable statistical sources, fewer historical studies appeared on agriculture than other sectors of the economy. At a conference held at the *Fundación Juan March* in Madrid in 1977 a start was made to rectify this glaring anomaly. Among other matters, the participants, who included many young researchers, set out an agenda for future investigations. At the top of their list were property rights, the means of production, techniques used along with the quantitative results of exploitation and the commercialization of production.¹ Over the following decade, the findings of these and other scholars saw light in a number of articles and books. For agricultural historians interested in Spain, the journals *Agricultura y Sociedad*, *Estudios d'Història Agrària*, *Recerques*, *Moneda y Crédito* and the *Revista de Historia Económica* have become required reading, while the Bank of Spain, the Ministry of Agriculture and the *Instituto de Estudios Fiscales* have published important monographs and collections of articles.² Not surprisingly at a time of political devolution, a rekindling of interest in regional topics has led to many important local studies.³ However, without doubt, the

greatest contribution to Spanish agricultural history in the modern period is the three volume work *Historia agraria de la España contemporánea* which came out in 1985 and 1986. It would be impossible to produce a survey article on recent writings in Spanish agricultural history without frequent references to this invaluable collection of articles.⁴

Stagnation or Growth?

There is widespread agreement that throughout the nineteenth century and beyond the Spanish economy grew less rapidly than those economies to the north of the Pyrénées. According to the estimates of Gabriel Tortella, income per capita in nineteenth-century Spain rose by as little as 0.5 per cent per annum, between a quarter and a half of the average for the more advanced European economies.⁵ Further evidence of Spanish economic backwardness at this time is provided by the country's low level of urbanization. In 1900, for example, only nine per cent of the population lived in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The corresponding figure for 1930 was 15 per cent. Vicente Pérez Moreda's studies of the Spanish population between 1797 and 1930 reinforce the view of the immobilism of the Spanish economy before 1910. In quantitative terms, agriculture accounted for more than half of the

* The author wishes to thank the British Academy and the Leverhulme Foundation for research grants to work on the economic history of modern Spain.

¹ Gonzalo Anes, et al, *La economía agraria en la historia de España: propiedad, explotación, comercialización, rentas*, Madrid, 1979.

² See below.

³ See for example Rafael Aracil, Teresa Carnero, Marius García Bonafe and Jordi Palafox, 'Els estudis d'història agrària al País Valencià', in *Institució Alfons el Magnànim, I. Col. loqui d'Història Agrària*, Valencia, 1983, pp 79–117; Antonio M. Bernal, 'Economía agraria en la Andalucía contemporánea', *Papeles de Economía Española*, 20, 1984, pp 281–97; Fausto Dopico, 'Fuerza de trabajo, rendimiento y producción agraria en Galicia a finales del siglo xix', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 1 (ii), 1983, pp 147–64; Ramon Garrabou, *Un fals dilema: modernitat o endarreriment de l'agricultura valenciana, 1850–1900*, Valencia, 1985; Ramon Garrabou and Josep Pujol, 'El canvi agrari a la Catalunya del segle xix', *Recerques*, 19, 1987, pp 35–83; Ramon Garrabou and Eva Serra, 'Els estudis d'història agrària a Catalunya', in *Institució Alfons el Magnànim, op cit*, pp 41–78; Isabel Moll, 'La història agrària de Mallorca: segles xvi al xx', *Institució Alfons el Magnànim, op cit*, pp 133–53; Jordi Palafox, 'Agricultura d'especulació i crisi econòmica: el País Valencià durant els anys trenta, 1900–36', *Estudios d'Història Agrària*, 3, 1979, pp 139–62; Jordi Palafox and Teresa Carnero, 'La econ-

omía del País Valenciano, 1750–1936: crecimiento sin industrialización', *Información Comercial Española*, 586, 1982, pp 21–31; Carmelo Pellejero Martínez, 'La crisis agraria de finales del siglo xix en Málaga', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 4, 1986, pp 549–85; María Teresa Pérez Picazo and Guy Lemeunier, 'Els estudis d'història agrària a la regió murciana: l'estat de la qüestió', *Estudios d'Història Agrària*, 4, 1983, pp 63–84; Ricardo Robledo, *La renta de la tierra en Castilla la Vieja y León, 1856–1913*, Madrid, 1984; M. Xosé Rodríguez Galdo and Fausto Dopico, *Crisis agrarias y crecimiento económico en Galicia en el siglo xix*, Corunna, 1981; Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, 'Castilla en el siglo xix: una involución económica', *Revista de Occidente*, 17, 1982, pp 35–49; and Ramón Villares, *La propiedad de la tierra en Galicia*, Madrid, 1982.

⁴ The three volumes of *Historia agraria de la España contemporánea* are Angel García Sanz and Ramon Garrabou (eds), *Cambio social y nuevas formas de propiedad, 1850–1900*, Barcelona, 1985; Ramon Garrabou and Jesús Sanz (eds), *Expansión y crisis, 1850–1900*, Barcelona, 1985 and Ramon Garrabou, Carlos Barciela and José Ignacio Jiménez Blanco (eds), *El final de la agricultura tradicional, 1900–60*, Barcelona, 1986.

⁵ Gabriel Tortella, 'Producción y productividad agraria, 1830–1930', in Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz (ed), *La modernización económica de España, 1830–1930*, Madrid, 1985, pp 63–88 and by the same author 'La agricultura en la economía de la España contemporánea, 1830–1930', *Papeles de Economía Española*, 20, 1984, pp 62–75.

country's Gross Domestic Product at the beginning of the nineteenth century and gave employment to two-thirds of the active labour force. Over the course of the century this situation hardly varied.⁶ On the eve of the Spanish Civil War, 45 per cent of Spaniards worked on the land, accounting for approximately 35 per cent of GDP.⁷

Tortella's appraisal of the performance of Spain's agricultural sector in the nineteenth century is far from optimistic. Basing his judgement on a loose Bairoch-Kuznets model, Tortella contends that Spanish agriculture failed in its modernizing role in a number of vital respects.

1 The production of foodstuffs and in particular wheat, Spain's principal agricultural product, did little more than keep pace with demographic growth. Although widespread famine, characteristic of the final years of the *ancien régime*, tended to disappear, subsistence crises and high levels of mortality persisted until at least 1868.

2 Exports of wheat, often cited as proof of agricultural expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century, were tiny by comparison with total output. Leandro Prados' calculations on the export of wheat and flour over the period 1826-49 show that they represented no more than one per cent of the total harvest. During the third quarter of the century exports of wheat and flour were even less significant. After 1875 they went into deficit.⁸

3 Where agriculture failed most disastrously was as a demander of industrial products. With regard to consumer goods, low aggregate demand from the overwhelmingly rural population for Catalan textiles is frequently mentioned as a prime cause for overproduction during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ As a market for capital goods, the Spanish countryside proved even more disappointing. Technological stagnation was ubiquitous. Without the stimulus of new orders for tools, machinery, artificial fertilizers, etc, Spain's iron and steel, engineering and chemical industries languished.

4 Nor did Spain's farmers supply much capital, willingly or otherwise, to other sectors of the economy. While there is evidence that agriculture bore a disproportionate burden of taxation, little of the revenue collected by the Exchequer was invested productively. As to private investment, Spanish farmers distrusted the banks and preferred to hoard precious metals.

5 Encouragingly, after the 1870s agriculture began to display timid signs of export potential. Progress came not from wheat, now under threat from cheap imports, but those crops in which Spain had an absolute or comparative advantage. These were the products of Mediterranean agriculture; horticulture, the vine, citrus fruit, olive oil, dried fruit and cork. By the turn of the century such items were responsible for around 35 per cent of total Spanish exports by value. Even so, they accounted for no more than 15 per cent of the cultivated land surface (excluding livestock and forestry).¹⁰

If Tortella's approach seems gloomy, in a challenging new interpretation of modern Spanish economic history Leandro Prados offers some more optimistic conclusions about the performance of Spanish agriculture before 1900.¹¹ Never a scholar to eschew controversy, Prados reduced some agricultural historians to near apoplexy by his re-elaboration of source material.

The material in question is the well-known *Censo de Frutos y Manufacturas* of 1799 and the estimates of the *Junta General de Estadística* made in 1857 on yields of cereals, legumes, the olive and the vine. In the case of the former, over two decades ago Josep Fontana, after a detailed analysis, warned historians against using the document. As for the 1857 study, Tortella reminds us that the *Junta* placed so little reliance in its own findings that it refused to publish its figures.¹² However, Prados forthrightly claims that his calculations demonstrate that, far from simply keeping pace with population growth, agricultural production outstripped the latter. Moreover, despite the fact that two-thirds of the active labour force were tied to the land as late as 1910, that figure hides a variety of crucial developments. Above all, a more intensive use of both land and labour took place. Farmers began to switch from subsistence farming to production for the market. Notwithstanding the absence of technological change, Prados stresses the fact that export orders fostered important improvements in the organization of production. Following Arthur Lewis, Prados maintains that the

⁶ Vicente Pérez Moreda, 'En defensa del censo de Godoy: Observaciones previas al estudio de la población activa española a finales de siglo xviii', in Gonzalo Anes, Luis Angel Rojo and Pedro Tedde (eds), *Historia económica y pensamiento social: estudios en homenaje a Diego Mateo del Peral*, Madrid, 1983, pp 283-99; 'La modernización demográfica, 1800-1930: sus limitaciones y cronología', in Sánchez Albornoz, *op cit*, pp 25-66; and 'Evolución de la población española desde finales del Antiguo Régimen', *Papeles de Economía Española*, 20, 1984, pp 20-38.

⁷ Julio Alcaide, 'Una revisión urgente de la Renta Nacional española en el siglo xx', in Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, *Datos básicos para la historia financiera de España, 1850-1975*, 2 vols, Madrid, 1976, 1, p 1136.

⁸ Leandro Prados, *Comercio exterior y crecimiento económico en España, 1826-1913: tendencias a largo plazo*, Madrid, 1982, Appendix B.

⁹ Jordi Nadal, *El fracaso de la Revolución industrial en España, 1814-1913*, Barcelona, 1975, pp 212-16.

¹⁰ Tortella, *Producción y productividad*, pp 67-73.

¹¹ Leandro Prados, *De imperio a nación: Crecimiento y atraso económico en España, 1780-1930*, Madrid, 1988.

¹² Josep Fontana, 'El Censo de Frutos y Manufacturas de 1799: un análisis crítico', *Moneda y Crédito*, 101, 1967, pp 54-89; Tortella, *Producción y productividad*, pp 74-5.

emigration of substantial numbers of the rural population to Latin America, in the face of foreign competition, brought not insignificant increases in productivity since those who left often had a productivity level close to zero. Throwing down the gauntlet at most economic historians, Prados goes even further. The failure of Spain to overcome its economic backwardness, he contends, lies not with agriculture, but with the mediocre performance of manufacturing industry. While farmers were increasingly capable of responding to external stimuli, industry remained highly uncompetitive. Thus, urban Spain failed to soak up any excess labour in the countryside which in turn would have triggered off a substitution of capital for labour on the farm.¹³

Among Prados' keenest critics are an indefatigable group of young agricultural historians, the *Grupo de Estudios de Historia Rural* (GEHR), who set great store on the collection and analysis of raw data. The GEHR base their own findings on the availability after 1890 – and not before – of a number of series on production, surface area and yields of the leading agricultural products, together with additional information on secondary crops, forestry and livestock. After more than a decade of their publications, conference reports, etc, it is now difficult to sustain the previously held position of agrarian immobilism and economic stagnation during the first three decades of the present century. Among their conclusions is that between 1900 and 1931 agricultural production rose by 55 per cent, an annual rate of 1.4 per cent, more than twice that of neighbouring France. From 1910 to 1922 it is said to have grown by 2.13 per cent. Since population increased by only 0.8 per cent over the three decades, agricultural income per capita must have expanded by an annual rate of 0.6 per cent. Within the agricultural sector, livestock grew by 123 per cent, a sign of improving living standards. Citrus fruit also prospered in response to export demand.¹⁴

It has to be stated that the publications of the GEHR have been much commented upon. Critics concede that their investigations are conducted in a careful and exhaustive manner. Praise also has been heaped on their sophisticated statistical apparatus and deeply-held convictions. Yet doubts and reservations linger among economic historians. Can the figures on livestock be true, or was such a spectacular

increase due to better data gathering?¹⁵ For his part, Gabriel Tortella reproduces the GEHR's findings verbatim while pointing out that as late as 1931 cereals and legumes, with their lower increases in productivity, still accounted for 75 per cent of the cultivated surface, generating 45 per cent of agricultural income.¹⁶

Whatever level of growth was achieved in the Spanish countryside during the first third of the present century was violently interrupted by the outbreak of civil war in 1936. In the aftermath of the conflict the victorious Nationalists, four-fifths of whose army was composed of peasants, set itself a variety of unrealizable targets on the land. Carlos Barciela demonstrates that historians should be extremely wary when using official statistics produced during the early years of the Franco regime. Extravagant claims to have resettled 577,000 hectares of land between 1940 and 1951, for example, are shown by Barciela to be completely fictitious. Instead, over the same period 9886 hectares were transformed by the National Colonization Institute, affecting the lives of a mere 1759 peasant families.¹⁷ Intervention by the authorities to stimulate the production of wheat and olive oil served to create a black market which, in the case of wheat, became larger than the official market.¹⁸

Social Change and New Forms of Property, 1800–50

Accounts of rural life in Spain during the final years of the *ancien régime* stress the persistence of routine, rudimentary farming techniques and mass illiteracy among the peasantry.¹⁹ Although the late eighteenth century witnessed the publication of a plethora of tracts on agriculture, including translations of French and English works on agronomy and physiocracy,

¹³ Jordi Maluquer, 'De la crisis colonial a la guerra europea: veinte años de economía española', in Jordi Nadal, Albert Carreras and Carles Sudrià (eds), *La economía española en el siglo xx: una perspectiva histórica*, Barcelona, 1987, pp 62–104.

¹⁴ Tortella, *Producción y productividad*, pp 84–5. For a different treatment see Antonio M. Bernal, 'La llamada crisis finisecular, 1872–1919', in José Luis García Delgado (ed), *La España de la Restauración: política, economía, legislación y cultura: I Coloquio de Segovia sobre historia contemporánea de España*, Madrid, 1985, pp 215–63.

¹⁵ Carlos Barciela, introduction to the second part of *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 383–454.

¹⁶ Carlos Barciela, 'El estraperlo de trigo en la postguerra', *Moneda y Crédito*, 159, 1981, pp 17–37. José Manuel Naredo, 'La incidencia del estraperlo en la economía de las grandes fincas del sur', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 19, 1981, pp 81–115. For intervention in wheat production see Carlos Barciela, *La financiación del Servicio Nacional del Trigo, 1937–71*, Madrid, 1981, and for olive oil Carmen Gutiérrez, 'Una estimación del mercado negro de aceite de oliva en la posguerra española', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 29, 1983.

¹⁷ Pedro Ruiz Torres, 'Crisis señorial y transformación agraria en la España de principios del siglo xix', *Hispania*, 153, 1983, pp 89–128. Gonzalo Anes, 'El sector agrario en la España moderna', *Papeles de Economía Española*, 20, 1984, pp 2–19.

¹³ Prados, *De imperio a nación*, *passim*.

¹⁴ Grupo de Estudios de Historia Rural (GEHR), 'Notas sobre la producción agraria española, 1891–1931', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 1 (ii), 1983, pp 185–252. José Ignacio Jiménez Blanco, introduction to *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 9–141. On statistical sources for this period see Jesús Sanz, 'Notas introductorias al libro de Eduardo de la Sotilla: Producción y riqueza agrícola de España en el último decenio del siglo xix y primero del xx', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 18, 1981, pp 303–30.

their authors were, as Lluís Argemí informs us, voices crying in the wilderness.²⁰ Unable to stay abreast with population expansion, traditional agriculture was plunged into crisis after about 1760. Josep Fontana reckons that income from the tithe and other feudal dues reached a peak towards 1780. The grave famine which afflicted Castile in 1804 bore witness to the exhaustion of feudal relations.²¹

While we do not know with any certainty the area under cultivation in eighteenth-century Spain, nor the evolution of livestock, apart from the fortunes of a few transhumant flocks, we are aware that after 1730 the price of wheat began to increase more quickly than the price of wool.²² In the final quarter of the century violent fluctuations occurred in wheat prices, especially pronounced in the interior, due to harvest failures and difficulties in transporting imported grain. Farmers responded by ploughing up additional land, often as a result of deforestation. Hence diminishing marginal returns set in, bringing with them further subsistence crises. Contemporary reformers, such as Jovellanos, saw the persistence of feudal property rights as the main obstacle to progress in agriculture. Emiliano Fernández de Pinedo calculates that during the final years of the *ancien régime* at least half of the total land surface of Spain was immobilized by amortisation.²³ Moreover, notwithstanding the collapse of wool prices in the second half of the eighteenth century, the ancient rights of the sheep grazers of the Mesta guild, strengthened by subsequent legislation, prevented the sowing of wheat on lands over which transhumant flocks were permitted to pasture.²⁴

In his introduction to volume one of the *Agrarian History of Contemporary Spain*, Angel García Sanz contends that the first half of the nineteenth century saw nothing less than a thoroughgoing liberal bourgeois revolution south of the Pyrenees. Its goal was the imposition of a new model of society and the removal of legal obstacles to capitalist development. In the countryside, a set of measures, initiated in

1811, set out to abolish the seigniorial regime thereby debilitating the economic base of the nobility which was founded on privilege. The abolition of feudalism did not in itself imply a change in land ownership. This followed primarily from another series of measures carried out from 1798 onwards aimed at the transfer of property held in mortmain to new hands and with it the freedom of utilization.²⁵

Unable to carry through their revolution in isolation, the bourgeoisie were forced to collaborate with the nobility whose own economies were experiencing severe liquidity problems owing to peasant resistance over the payment of feudal dues. The victims of what García Sanz terms this unwritten agreement were the peasantry stripped of the institutions and customary practices which offered security against the inexorable laws of the market.²⁶

The disamortization of lands which were previously owned by the Church and of communal property is the subject of a vast literature. A useful short account of the land sales which took place while the legislative process was in full force is that of Francisco Simón Segura. Segura sets out the leading characteristics of the four main phases of disamortization:

- 1 1798-1808; the first of the great sales of ecclesiastical property often associated with the name of Godoy;
- 2 The measures associated with the short-lived Liberal triennium of 1820-23;
- 3 Mendizábal's attempt to sell off the lands of the secular and regular clergy, 1836-44;
- 4 Madoz's General Disentailing Act, in operation from 1856 to 1868.²⁷

While lack of space prevents a detailed treatment of the process of land sales and its consequences for agriculture, readers are referred to the bibliographical and historical studies of Germán Rueda, Josep Fontana's treatment of the Mendizábal reforms and their antecedents and the two volume blockbuster of the proceedings of a conference held in 1982 on disamortization and the public exchequer.²⁸ Francisco Tomás y Valiente in his summing up at the above gathering praised the high quality, theoretical

²⁰ Lluís Argemí, 'Agronomía y revolución agraria en España, 1750-1820', chapter one of Ernest Lluch and Lluís Argemí, *Agronomía y fisiocracia en España, 1750-1820*, Valencia, 1985.

²¹ Josep Fontana, 'La crisis agraria de comienzos del siglo xix: sus repercusiones en España', *Hacienda Pública Española*, 55, 1978, pp 177-90, reprinted in *Historia agraria*, 1, pp 103-28.

²² Enrique Llopis Agelán, 'Las explotaciones transhumantes en el siglo xviii y el primer tercio del xix: la cabaña del Monasterio de Guadalupe, 1709-1835', in Gonzalo Anes, Pedro Tedde, Josep Fontana and Miguel Artola (eds), *La economía española al final del Antiguo Régimen*, 1, Agricultura, Madrid, 1982, pp 1-101.

²³ Emiliano Fernández de Pinedo, *Centralismo, ilustración y agonía del Antiguo Régimen, 1715-1833*, vol 7 of the *Historia de España*, Madrid, 1980, p 55.

²⁴ Angel García Sanz, 'La agonía de la Mesta y el hundimiento de las exportaciones laneras: un capítulo de la crisis del Antiguo Régimen en España', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 6, 1978, pp 283-316, reprinted in *Historia agraria*, pp 174-216.

²⁵ Angel García Sanz, 'Crisis de la agricultura tradicional y revolución liberal, 1800-50', in *Historia agraria*, 1, pp 7-99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 13-15.

²⁷ Francisco Simón Segura, 'La desamortización española del siglo xix', *Papeles de Economía Española*, 20, 1984, pp 74-107.

²⁸ Germán Rueda, 'Bibliografía sobre el proceso desamortizador en España', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 19, 1981, pp 215-47 and by the same author *La desamortización de Mendizábal y Espartero en España*, Madrid, 1986. There is an article with the same title in *Información Comercial Española*, 623, 1983, pp 53-66. See also Josep Fontana, 'La desamortización de Mendizábal y sus antecedentes', in *Historia agraria*, 1, pp 219-44 and Ministerio de Agricultura/Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, *Desamortización y Hacienda Pública*, 2 vols, Madrid, 1986.

and methodological rigour of Spanish historiography on disamortization and called for an agenda for future research. Among other matters, he advocated that future research concentrate on uncharted provinces and greater emphasis on the Madoz period.²⁹

The virtual absence of statistical detail, caused by troubles in collecting the tithe and the latter's abandonment after 1837, make the middle decades of the nineteenth century the least known in the agricultural history of contemporary Spain.³⁰ However, there is general agreement that the disentailing process led to a sharp increase in the cultivated surface, while pasture and woodland declined. The result was an expansion in the area under the so-called Mediterranean trilogy of wheat, the vine and the olive at the expense of livestock. Meanwhile, the lack of technological improvements, plus a fall in the amount of animal manure, resulted in falling yields, especially on recently ploughed up marginal lands.³¹

In contrast to what was previously held, there is now ample evidence to convince us that the expansion of agricultural production preceded the Mendizábal reforms. Among factors cited to support this view are:

- 1 An increase in population after 1821 which led to an expanding demand for foodstuffs and later gave rise to additional employment on the land.
- 2 An act of 1820 banning imports of grain.
- 3 The spread of the potato.
- 4 Exports of wheat and flour after 1827.
- 5 Complaints about the ploughing up of lands normally grazed by Mesta flocks.

Josep Fontana, writing on the agricultural depression which followed the Napoleonic Wars, moreover, argues that a sharp fall in prices after 1817, not accompanied to a commensurate drop in taxes, forced peasants to produce increasing quantities of foodstuffs for the market.³²

²⁹ Francisco Tomás y Valiente, 'Desamortización y Hacienda Pública: reflexiones: entre la crítica y las sugerencias', *Hacienda Pública Española*, 77, 1982, pp 15-31.

³⁰ On the tithe see Esteban Canales, 'Los diezmos en la etapa final', in Anes, Tedde, Fontana and Artola, *op cit*, pp 105-87 and by the same author 'Diezmos y revolución burguesa' in *Historia agraria*, 1, pp 245-74.

³¹ On livestock farming see GEHR, 'Contribución al análisis histórico de la ganadería española, 1865-1929', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 8, 1978, pp 129-73 and 10, 1979, pp 105-69. For a pioneering study on overall developments see Gonzalo Anes, 'La agricultura española desde comienzos del siglo xix hasta 1868: algunos problemas', in Servicio de Estudios del Banco de España, *Ensayos sobre la economía española a mediados del siglo xix*, Madrid, 1970, pp 235-63.

³² Fontana, *La crisis agraria, passim*, Enrique Llopis Agelán, Algunas consideraciones acerca la producción agraria castellana en los últimos veinticinco años del Antiguo Régimen', *Investigaciones Económicas*, 21, 1983, pp 135-51, reprinted in *Historia agraria*, 1, pp 129-50. On the potato see M. Xosé Rodríguez Galdo and Fausto Dopico, 'Novos cultivos e agricultura tradicional: a pataca a Galicia nos séculos xviii a xix', *Revista Galega de Estudos*

Expansion and Crisis, 1850-1900

Ramon Garrabou and Jesús Sanz in their introduction to the second volume of the *Agrarian History of Contemporary Spain* contend that the basic condition for the expansion of Spanish agriculture, which persisted until the 1870s, was an Act of 1820 prohibiting cereal imports. This ban, in existence until 1869, was enacted at a time of severe financial difficulties after the loss of the greater part of Spain's empire in the New World. Among the aims of the legislators were the reduction of imports, the stimulation of domestic production and the encouragement of exports. Indeed the 1820 Act, which was renewed in 1834, presaged a strong increase in inter-regional trade. Before long, wheat cultivated in the provinces of the interior went on sale on the periphery. As a direct consequence, coastal regions, no longer compelled to be self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs, began to scale down cereal cultivation in favour of more profitable crops such as fruit and horticultural products. The process was facilitated by falling grain prices in the 1820s allowing for the absorption of transport and other costs which more than doubled prices prevailing in the places of origin.³³

The hub of the wheat trade for nearly half a century was the northern part of Santander which contained a number of flour mills much of whose production was exported to the remaining Spanish colony of Cuba. Wheat from Old Castile was carried along part or whole of the 138 kilometre stretch of the Canal de Castilla from Valladolid to Alar del Rey. From there it was transported by mule a further 130 kilometres to Santander. According to Tomás Martínez Vara, the coastal trade in wheat between Santander and the Mediterranean ports, which took off in the 1820s, began to expand rapidly after 1846 and reached a maximum in the period 1859-63. In 1863, however, the opening of a railway link between Barcelona and Valladolid posed an insurmountable threat to the coastal route. Next year coastal shipping fell by a half, not least because the railways offered an immediate twenty-five per cent cut in freight rates.³⁴

In the interpretation of Garrabou and Sanz, the progressive integration of the Spanish market for foodstuffs, together with a growing regional specialization, was accompanied by a rise in agricultural exports to northern Europe. This was true not only of Mediterranean crops such as wine and olive oil

Agrarios, 3, 1980, pp 11-36.

³³ Ramon Garrabou and Jesús Sanz, 'La agricultura española durante el siglo xix: inmovilismo o cambio?', in *Historia agraria*, 2, pp 7-191.

³⁴ Tomás Martínez Vara, *Santander de villa a ciudad: un siglo de esplendor y crisis*, Santander, 1983, pp 215-65, Antonio Gómez Mendoza, *Ferrocarriles y cambio económico en España, 1855-1913*, Madrid, 1982, pp 63-120.

but also of the rearing of beef cattle in the north western region of Galicia. Wine production which, apart from sherry, expanded to meet domestic demand, found an important market in France after 1870 when the outbreak of phylloxera ravaged vineyards north of the Pyrenees. Teresa Carnero calculates that consequent upon a Franco-Spanish commercial agreement of 1882 exports of Spanish wine to France quadrupled over the next decade. Ninety per cent of sales consisted of *vin ordinaire* used to fortify the French product.³⁵ As Juan Francisco Zambrana shows, there were two main zones of olive oil production in Spain; Andalusia in the south and Catalonia-Aragon in the north east of the peninsula. While the latter area specialized in high quality production for culinary purposes, the former region sacrificed quality for quantity. External demand was principally for industrial uses such as heating, lighting, lubricants and soap manufacture.³⁶ Elsewhere, Xan Carmona estimates that exports of beef from Galicia to Great Britain rose more than tenfold between the periods 1850-60 and 1880-84.³⁷

Thanks to a fair degree of tariff protection in Spain, even during the country's so-called era of free trade (1869-91), the agricultural depression which afflicted Western Europe from the 1870s onwards made a belated appearance south of the Pyrenees. Its impact has been charted by Ramon Garrabou who demonstrates that the first significant signs were felt in the wheat sector where imports went up after 1882. Most of the grain originated, not from America, but from Russia and Turkey, which were geographically closer to the main importing regions of the Mediterranean. By 1885-9 foreign wheat was cheaper to purchase on the periphery than Castilian grain. A spectacular rise in imports took place in 1893-4, despite the imposition of higher duties. In a year of poor harvests at home, Garrabou calculates, imported wheat accounted for about 15 per cent of consumption, compared with as little as five per cent following a bumper crop.³⁸ For a brief spell, viticulture escaped the crisis. However, declining prices after 1887 owing to overproduction, competition from Algeria in the French market, France's cancellation of the 1882 treaty in 1891, and the encroachment of phylloxera into the peninsula all combined with devastating effects.

Replanting the ruined Spanish vineyards with the more resistant American stock proved a costly business. In Catalonia, for example, large areas of the provinces of Lerida and Gerona abandoned viticulture altogether.³⁹ Olive oil encountered severe difficulties due to foreign competition from other oils. Andalusia, with its low grade products, was worst hit. New plantings and improvements in methods of refining the oil were eventually to bring about recovery. Yet prices remained depressed until 1907.⁴⁰ To complete the depressing picture, competition from Argentina and New Zealand put an end to the near monopoly which Galician livestock exports had enjoyed in the British market.⁴¹

Amidst mounting tension in the rural community, in 1887-8 the Sagasta Liberal government proposed a variety of measures which José María Serrano characterizes as an attempt at agricultural renewal. Correctly diagnosing the crisis as mainly due to foreign competition, the Liberals attempted to remedy the situation by such means as the greater utilization of agricultural machinery, the widespread application of artificial fertilizers, the fight against disease and irrigation techniques.⁴² In 1887 Sagasta established a commission of inquiry which took three years to report and thereafter gathered dust on the shelves. Garrabou sees this body as lacking in a clear diagnosis of the depression hence blaming such factors as excessive taxation, escalating wage costs, lack of capital and high cost of transport.⁴³ As the situation deteriorated, the option of renewal appeared to politicians and farmers alike to lack the necessary urgency. Prompted by the newly-formed and vociferous *Liga Agraria*, the Conservative leader Cánovas advocated a hefty dose of tariff protection in order to safeguard the livelihoods of farmers in the two Castiles, Aragon and Extremadura. Carnero among others, however, views the 1891 tariff introduced by the Conservatives as a response to a newly emergent agrarian-industrial bloc whose demands included the reservation of the domestic market for Spanish producers.⁴⁴

The subsequent strengthening of protectionist legislation in 1906 and 1922 was to serve as an excuse for the virtual absence of a coherent agricultural policy. While large landowners were able to

³⁵ Teresa Carnero, *Expansión vinícola y atraso agrario, 1870-1900*, Madrid, 1980. See also her article of the same title in *Historia agraria*, 2, pp 279-300.

³⁶ Juan Francisco Zambrana, 'El olivar español, 1870-1930', in *Historia agraria*, 2, pp 301-20.

³⁷ Xan Carmona, 'Sobre as orixes da orientación exportadora na produción bovina galega: as exportacións a Inglaterra na segunda metade do século XIX', *Grial*, anexo 1, 1982, pp 169-206.

³⁸ Ramon Garrabou, 'La crisis agraria española de finales del siglo XIX: una etapa del desarrollo del capitalismo', in *Historia agraria*, 2, pp 477-542.

³⁹ Juan M. Guisado, 'Crisis agraria y invasión filoxérica en la España del siglo XIX', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 1 (ii), 1983, pp 165-84.

⁴⁰ Zambrana, *art cit*, pp 309-10.

⁴¹ Manuel Jaime Barreiro Gil, 'La generalización de la producción de mercancías y la modernización productiva de la agricultura de Galicia, 1876-1976', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 2, 1983, pp 133-46.

⁴² José María Serrano Sanz, *El viraje proteccionista de la Restauración: la política comercial española, 1875-95*, Madrid, 1987, pp 105-14.

⁴³ Garrabou, *La crisis agraria*, p 318.

⁴⁴ Carnero, 'Expansión agrícola y atraso agrario, 1870-1900', in *Historia agraria*, 2, pp 288-90. Cf Serrano Sanz, *op cit*, pp 123-63.

safeguard their interests behind the shelter of the tariff, peasant farmers, lacking sufficient capital, were driven to usury and emigration. Surveying the alternatives open to Spain's leaders in the 1890s, Gabriel Tortella is critical of their refusal to countenance a fuller transfer of resources from unproductive cereal farming to more lucrative Mediterranean crops. To date, he maintains, historians of this period have tended to speak in terms of free trade versus protectionism. Yet this dichotomy is misleading. In the case of Spain, the political leaders settled for extreme protectionism as an answer to the threat to rural income. With careful management, the tariff might have been used to help regulate the rural exodus. Instead, it became a barrier to the process of change.⁴⁵

The End of Traditional Agriculture, 1900-60

It is the revisionist argument of the GEHR, reiterated in volume three of the *Agrarian History of Contemporary Spain*, that despite the absence of a fully-fledged policy for Spanish agriculture, the first third of the present century witnessed a hitherto unacknowledged expansion in the Spanish countryside. Not least, the period was marked by the spread of a number of new crops, including oranges, almonds, root crops, tubers, potatoes, sugar beet and horticultural products.⁴⁶ Many of these crops, like citrus fruit, responded to increases in foreign demand. At the forefront of this development was the Levante which started to export oranges during the second half of the nineteenth century. By the first third of the twentieth century the latter were one of the principal sources of income for the national economy.⁴⁷ In contrast, the spread of sugar beet, centred on Aragon and Andalusia, owed everything to burgeoning domestic demand following the loss of Cuba – with its huge sugar cane interests – in 1898.⁴⁸ Along with olive growing, which developed into one of the most dynamic sectors of the Spanish economy before the civil war, the expansion of oranges and sugar beet required enormous injections of capital to maintain levels of productivity. Domingo Gallego analyses the rising demands of Mediterranean agriculture over the period 1900-30

for such items as new seeds, deep ploughs, irrigation, mineral fertilizers, pesticides, presses, etc.⁴⁹

One particular difficulty faced by agricultural historians is that of squaring up the spectacular progress described by the GEHR with the perennial complaints of contemporaries of an agricultural crisis which endured from the early 1870s down to the rural unrest – the so-called Bolshevik triennium – of 1918-20. After the eruption of anarchist disturbances in the south in 1902-5, the 'agrarian question' was rechristened the 'social question', especially by foreign writers. Particular attention was paid to the centre of the troubles, the *latifundio* belt of Andalusia, with its huge unproductive estates, absentee landlords and half-starved agricultural labourers. Pierre Ponsot lists 89 major titles dealing with the problems of Andalusia during the period 1880-1919.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Antonio Miguel Bernal in a masterly study of the so-called agricultural crisis, 1872-1919, lays emphasis on Spain's highly unequal property structure. At the opposite end of the scale to the *latifundios*, the north and north-west of the peninsula were littered with millions of tiny parcels of land, known as *minifundios*, capable of little more than subsistence farming. Both systems, Bernal informs us, were archaic. Yet neither was entirely stagnant and both were profitable. In what the author admits to be a simplified and imperfect model, extrapolating other forms of land holding, it is contended that both systems made a rational use of available factors of production. The *minifundio* lacked capital and technology but benefited from surplus labour in the shape of the extended family. In the absence of industrial development close to hand, considerable numbers of peasants emigrated to Latin America. Emigrant remittances, meanwhile, allowed for the redemption of leases (*foros*), a *cause célèbre* of the second half of the nineteenth century, and permitted some modernization of farms and equipment. Even so, there was little modification of the system before 1936. For their part, the large estates of the south offered exploiters the availability of cheap labour and a repressive rural police force (the *guardia civil*). The use of machinery remained largely a threat to dissuade labourers from making wage claims. Prices were kept high by tariff protection and a depreciating peseta (after 1892) which kept out imports. Both systems regulated the supply of labour, which was always in excess of demand. Hence profit levels were maintained. Yet the weakness of the modernization

⁴⁵ Gabriel Tortella, 'La economía española a finales del siglo y principios del siglo xx', in García Delgado, *op cit*, pp 133-51.

⁴⁶ Jiménez Blanco, introduction to *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 50-69.

⁴⁷ Jordi Palafox, 'Estructura de la exportación y distribución de beneficios: la naranja en el País Valenciano, 1920-30', *Revista de Historia Económica*, 1(iii), 1983, pp 339-51.

⁴⁸ Manuel Martín Rodríguez, *Azúcar y descolonización: origen y desenlace de una crisis agraria en la vega de Granada: El Ingenio de San Juan, 1882-1904*, Granada, 1982, José Ignacio Jiménez Blanco, 'La remolacha y los problemas de la industria azucarera en España, 1880-1914', in *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 280-316.

⁴⁹ Domingo Gallego, 'Transformaciones técnicas de la agricultura española en el primer tercio del siglo xx', in *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 171-229. See also Juan Francisco Zambrana, 'La fabricación de aceite de oliva en España, 1870-1930', *Agricultura y Sociedad*, 19, 1981, pp 267-90.

⁵⁰ Pierre Ponsot, *Etudes sur le dix-neuvième siècle espagnol*, Cordoba, 1981.

process and the under-performance of agriculture, with its intermittent crises, convinced many of the overwhelming need for agrarian reform. The social costs of *latifundismo* and *minifundismo*, were peasant agitation, violence and repression which reached a climax in the bloody conflict of 1936-9.⁵¹

The modernization of Spanish agriculture, after two decades of mistaken interventionist policies by the Franco regime, was both belated and rapid. It is unfair, as Carlos Barciela shows, to damn every aspect of Francoist agricultural policy, especially after Rafael Cavestany took over the Ministry of Agriculture in 1951. However from the late 1950s Spanish farmers were forced to respond to a series

of external factors entirely beyond their control. Between 1960 and 1970, in response to higher incomes abroad and the spread of industrialization and the service sector at home, two million Spaniards quit the land. In the period 1957-67 farm wages escalated by 269 per cent. Wherever economies of scale were practicable, farmers attempted to offset increased wage costs by substituting capital for labour. Over the sixties, Barciela recounts, the index of the use of machinery and fertilizers doubled, symbolic of the demise of traditional agriculture south of the Pyrénées.⁵²

⁵¹ Bernal, *op cit*, pp 257-63.

⁵² Barciela, introduction to the second part of *Historia agraria*, 3, pp 439-41, José Manuel Naredo, *Evolución de la agricultura en España*, second ed, Barcelona, p 70.