

Italian agricultural experts as transnational mediators: the creation of the International Institute of Agriculture, 1905 to 1908

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Abstract

This article examines the origins of the International Institute of Agriculture, looking at the campaign launched by the Italian government for the establishment of an international chamber of agriculture, which was discussed at a conference held in Rome in May 1905. This article challenges the ‘traditional tale’ of the birth of the earliest international organization in the primary sector by focusing on the reformist group that supported David Lubin’s initial idea. In parallel with the diplomatic negotiations, Italian experts were sent to the most important European countries to build support for conference. Their reports make it possible to observe the mobilization of agricultural cooperatives and unions in support of the project. Although it was suggested at this stage that the national organizations would be able to participate directly, the solution of establishing the International Institute of Agriculture as an intergovernmental body was finally chosen. This led to the creation of parallel bodies representing producers, but the initial concern to unify agriculturalists beyond national borders remained an underlying theme throughout the history of the Institute between 1905 and 1946.

Internationalization has been identified as the driving force of the agricultural revolution that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century: growth in global trade, falling transportation costs, new opportunities arising out of an overseas circulation of labour, crops and natural resources, all of these factors played a crucial role in economic expansion and rural transformation before the First World War.¹ However, problems were becoming globalized as well, such as animal pests, plant diseases, rural depopulation and price depression.

During this period, the primary sector became a sort of laboratory for new forms of cooperation between states, and informal networks emerged to deal with specialized economic and technical issues. The European – scientific, political, and economic – elites concerned with the future of agriculture reinforced their interconnections and, following their debates, their vision of an increasingly integrated world began to materialize. The first international congress of agriculture was held in Paris in 1889, and this transnational movement was then

¹ P. Bairoch, ‘Les trois révolutions agricoles du monde développé: rendements et productivité de 1800 à 1985’, *Annales ESC* 44 (1989), pp. 317–53.

pursued under the auspices of the Commission Internationale d'Agriculture (CIA), which was founded in 1891. In the following years, other regular meetings took place in the most prominent European cities, as previously explained in the introduction to these essays. Projects for permanent forms of inter-state collaboration were, for example, presented and discussed at the international congresses of agriculture held in Budapest (1896), Rome (1903), and Vienna (1907). On the governmental side, trade agreements, treaties, and common standards were negotiated and implemented.²

The idea of promoting international institutions to regulate these new dynamics appeared long before the representatives of forty governments met in Rome at the end of May 1905 and signed the diplomatic convention for the creation of the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA) ten days later, on 7 June. However, when it began to operate in 1908 after three years of preparation, the IIA became the first permanent intergovernmental organization specializing in the primary sector. It was charged to 'collect, study, and publish as promptly as possible'³ data and information on crops, prices, diseases, and farming systems from all over the world. The birth of the new organization has to be situated in the economic, political and cultural context of the first round of globalization of modern times, when Europe viewed itself as the centre of the world, and the great powers were thinking of the rest of the world in imperialistic terms or as spheres of influence. Despite the protectionist policies provoked by the long depression of the 1870s–1880s, the context was very different to that of the 1930s which prompted the economic and financial programmes undertaken by the League of Nations and its sibling organizations, which Madeleine Dungy analyses in her article using the example of central and eastern Europe.⁴

After having been studied for years in terms of their interwar failures and setbacks, the international organizations of the first half of the twentieth century have recently been rediscovered as a 'lens through which'⁵ transnational history can build up new comparative and connected approaches, rather than focusing on the existing institutional and national narratives. Even if several examples of recent research should be mentioned,⁶ international organizations concerned with agriculture seem to have been marginalized in this new interest in international organizations, despite the legacy of the IIA in the post-Second World War food order and its crucial role in the decision – taken in 1949 and implemented in 1951

² Cf. G. Noël, 'La solidarité agricole européenne. Des congrès d'agriculture à la politique agricole commune', in J. Canal, G. Pécout and M. Ridolfi (eds), *Sociétés rurales du XX^e siècle. France, Italie et Espagne* (2004), pp. 311–25.

³ Article 9 of the convention signed on 7 June 1905, in *Conférence Internationale d'Agriculture. Rome – MCMV. Procès-verbaux, Rome, Ministère Royal des Affaires étrangères* (1905), p. 113. There is an English translation in A. Hobson, *The International Institute of Agriculture (An historical and critical analysis of its organization, activities and policies of administration)* (1931), p. 328.

⁴ P. Clavin, *Securing the world economy. The reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (2013).

⁵ P. Clavin, 'Time, manner, place: writing modern European history in global, transnational and international contexts', *European Hist. Quarterly* 40 (2010), p. 630.

⁶ Cf. K. K. Patel (ed.), *Fertile ground for Europe? The history of European integration and the Common Agriculture Policy since 1945* (2009), and C. Knab and A. Ribi Forclaz (eds), 'Transnational co-operation in food, agriculture, environment and health in historical perspective', *Contemporary European Hist.* 20 (2011).

– to select Rome as the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).⁷

In fact, the history of the IIA is still largely unknown. Its birth has long been told as ‘the Romance of an Idea’⁸ made possible by the missionary engagement of David Lubin, the American self-made man born into a Jewish family which had migrated from Russian Poland when he was a child. Whilst his fortune was due to a chain of stores operating in Sacramento and the West Coast, in the 1880s Lubin had begun to invest in Californian agriculture. He also became involved in the associations of local fruit growers who were experiencing, at the time, a fundamental transformation of the regional farming system.⁹ Confronted with the economic and social crises of rural California, Lubin developed the idea of an international union of agriculturalists, as described by Olivia Rossetti Agresti, his translator, close collaborator, and, later, biographer. Over the following years, Lubin presented his project to various governments in Washington DC, London and Paris, but without success.¹⁰ It was only in October 1904 that he met with king Victor Emmanuel III and obtained Italian support for founding ‘an international institution, absolutely apolitical in its aims ... which would be an instrument of solidarity for all the components of the agricultural classes’.¹¹

The tale of the ‘Vaudeville-like circumstances’¹² occurring between the arrival of Lubin in Rome and the international conference in May 1905, became the official and widely accepted narrative of the creation of the IIA. Even works by Asher Hobson, the former US delegate to the IIA, validated this version and ascribed the origins of the first international organization in the primary sector to the extraordinary intuition and determination of two ‘great men’.¹³ It was only in the late 1980s that Luciano Tosi highlighted new elements, analysing how Italy managed to sustain a project without equal among the international institutions preceding the First World War. Looking in particular to the history of international relations, Tosi focused on the efforts of the Italian diplomats to rally and mobilize foreign governments around an initiative that they compared to The Hague Peace Conference organized in 1899 by Tsar Nicholas II.¹⁴

Italy was at that time a young nation with frustrated colonial ambitions, and its political elites hoped, through this project, to reinforce their international influence. The idea of federating the interests of agriculturalists beyond national borders was met with broad

⁷ Clavin, *Securing*, p. 346, and R. Jachertz and A. Nützenadel, ‘Coping with hunger? Visions of a global food system, 1930–1960’, *J. Global Hist.* 6 (2011), pp. 99–119.

⁸ It is the title of the eleventh chapter of the biography by O. Rossetti Agresti, *David Lubin. A study in practical idealism* (1922), pp. 185–205.

⁹ D. Vaught, *Cultivating California. Growers, specialty crops and labor, 1875–1920* (1999).

¹⁰ FAO, David Lubin Archives [hereafter DLA], Part 1, International Institute of Agriculture, Sect. 1. Papers in relation to the Founding of the IIA, doc. 1, ‘All American Agriculturalists’ (6 Oct. 1904).

¹¹ *Proclamation by H. M. Victor Emmanuel III King of Italy proposing an International Chamber of Agriculture*

and documents relating to the same. Rome, Feb. 1905 (1905), pp. 3–4.

¹² M. Augé-Laribé, *La Révolution agricole* (1955), p. 321 (author’s translation).

¹³ Cf. A. Hobson, ‘An American pioneer in international agriculture’, *J. Farm Economics* 14 (1932), pp. 574–85, and his book *The International Institute of Agriculture*, based on his doctoral dissertation in political science at the University of Geneva.

¹⁴ L. Tosi, ‘L’Italia e le origini dell’Istituto internazionale di agricoltura’, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali* 3 (1987), pp. 229–65, and id., *Alle origini della FAO. Le relazioni internazionali tra l’Istituto Internazionale di Agricoltura e la Società delle Nazioni* (Milan, 1989).

approval in the country and mobilized a heterogeneous universe of individuals and organizations. They included politicians, intellectuals, and experts, but also representatives of unions and interest groups who wished to seize the opportunity to foster durable economic and social development. Thus, the individual proposal of Lubin was transformed into a collective project thanks to a *nébuleuse réformatrice*, whose members came from different ideological camps but who all believed in the knowledge of facts as a tool for reform and promoted change through more cooperative models of organization.¹⁵ On the one hand, Lubin was a propagandist fully involved in the utopic design of an International Chamber of Agriculture 'to counterbalance the destructive effects of the concentration of Capital and Energy going on in the cities'.¹⁶ On the other, mediators from the *nébuleuse* were charged with materializing and making the project appealing in a European context, where national egoism dominated, and protectionist policies were the sole response to the international crises of the 1870s and 1880s.

This diverse group did not hesitate to use its transnational networks to promote and ensure the success of the initiative for the founding of the IIA.¹⁷ Three of the most prominent Italian economists also provided their scientific expertise to prepare the report submitted to the Italian government for official approval. While their political opinions differed, the neoclassical Maffeo Pantaleoni, the public finance theorist Antonio De Viti de Marco, and the social-reformist Giovanni Montemartini were all convinced that general welfare, as well as the fight against speculation, frauds and collusion could be furthered through the creation of an international office to observe and regulate the agricultural markets.¹⁸ Their efforts were supported by Luigi Luzzatti, another well-recognized Italian economist advocating an ethical approach to the 'dismal science'. Minister of the Treasury until March 1905, he would have been 'the power behind the throne'¹⁹ throughout all the preliminary steps for creating the IIA. The engagement of these figures was not surprising in a largely rural country where, at the beginning of the twentieth century, internal and external equilibria still relied on the primary sector: agriculture employed 60 per cent of the labour supply and produced around 40 per cent of GDP; the commercial balance was both dependent on food imports and sustained by the export of cash crops.

However, Italy was a special but not an exceptional case. All around the world, organizing agriculture was perceived as a common and urgent challenge, which arose from both the place of the agricultural sector in the economy and the role of the agriculturalists in society. Although the influence of the 'profound forces' on foreign policy has already been emphasized by diplomatic history, the idea here is to propose a social history of the origins of the IIA and

¹⁵ Neither the literal translation 'reformist nebula', nor the alternatives, 'reformist group' or 'reformist network', seem adequate to explain the idea of the French term *nébuleuse réformatrice*, which indicates an amorphous, heterogeneous, and often transnational network engaged in getting a social question on the political agenda, see C. Topalov (ed.), *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle. La nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880–1914* (Paris, 1999).

¹⁶ *Proclamation*, p. 9.

¹⁷ N. Mignemi, 'Une Chambre au service des agriculteurs? L'Italie et les origines de l'Institut international d'agriculture' (unpublished memoir of the École Française de Rome, 2016).

¹⁸ On these Italian economists, see M. E. L. Guidi and L. Michelini (eds), *Marginalismo e socialismo nell'Italia liberale, 1870–1925* (2001).

¹⁹ Rossetti Agresti, *David Lubin*, p. 197.

to examine how the transnational horizons of the new organization reshaped the intrastate rural class conflicts and the sectorial power struggles that pitted agriculture against industry. Testing the dualism 'state v society' in the case of the major New Deal farm programmes, Jess Gilbert and Carolyn Howe have demonstrated that 'the state helps constitute class relations, which also permeate state institutions',²⁰ and agricultural policies can be analysed as resulting from the dynamic interplay of state institutional capacities and social class capacities.

To this end, the present article intends to explore the institution-building process that led to the founding of the IIA during the first decade of the twentieth century. Its principal source will be the reports of the advocacy campaigns launched by Pantaleoni, De Viti de Marco and Montemartini, the three leading figures in 'the little band of workers through whom Lubin's dynamic force found expression'.²¹ Their initiative was largely encouraged by Luzzatti, who was convinced that the support of civil society and agricultural groups would be crucial in both forging a coalition favourable to the project, and persuading those governments who were initially sceptical of permanent forms of international cooperation. Parallel to traditional diplomatic channels, several Italian economists were called to serve as mediators and help the committee charged with preparing the programme of the May 1905 conference through the collection of materials on the local, regional and national forms of organization in the primary sector.²² During spring of 1905, two 'scientific ambassadors' were sent to the most important European countries to meet with civil servants, politicians, leaders of agrarian associations, and other key players in public and academic debates: the free trade activist Edoardo Giretti was sent to France, while the agricultural economist Giovanni Lorenzoni visited Austria, Hungary, Germany, and finally the Netherlands.

Their reports will be used here to reconstruct the steps preceding the birth of the IIA, with a specific focus on the mobilization of societal forces in several national contexts and the potential effects of the new organization on different group interests. First, the article will propose a transnational approach to the debates on the place of agriculturalists in ongoing economic and social transformations. Second, it will investigate the role of agrarian associations in the emergence of new institutional tools for the primary sector. Thirdly, it will analyse how the IIA emerged as an intergovernmental knowledge organization and consequently excluded other alternative models.

I

Giovanni Lorenzoni was charged with winning friends for the Italian initiative in Central Europe and, from early March to mid-April 1905, travelled to Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, and then Westphalia, Rhineland, Hesse, and Bavaria, with a short stay in the Netherlands and The Hague.²³ He was already a formidable expert on the German agricultural environment

²⁰ J. Gilbert and C. Howe, 'Beyond "State vs. Society": Theories of the state and New Deal agricultural policies', *American Sociological Rev.* 56 (1991), p. 218.

²¹ Rossetti Agresti, *David Lubin*, p. 196.

²² The monograph presented to the May 1905 international conference collects studies of the following

countries: Italy, France, United Kingdom, United States of America, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. See *L'iniziativa del Re d'Italia e l'Istituto Internazionale d'Agricoltura. Studi e documenti* (1905).

²³ Lorenzoni was the author of the studies of Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, *ibid.*, pp. 401–82.

having published a two-volume monograph on agricultural cooperation in 1901–02, prepared during his studies at universities of Vienna and Berlin where he specialized in political economy.²⁴ This work was based on extensive fieldwork and, throughout his entire scientific career, Lorenzoni attributed great importance to observational study, combining the old tradition of travel journals with the new analytical perspectives opened up by the social sciences. Therefore, the reports, which he regularly sent to the ‘Group of Three’ – Pantaleoni, De Viti de Marco and Montemartini – and to Luzzatti from March to April 1905, are extremely rich and detailed.

This unique source offers a global perspective on the debates that preceded and finally culminated in the creation of the IIA. When Lorenzoni left Rome on 5 March, knowledge of the Italian project outside Italy still relied largely on Lubin’s efforts and seemed, in fact, to have hit an impasse on both the national and international levels. A *Note to Diplomatic Agents* enclosed with the king’s letter asked local representations

to explain our ideas clearly to the Government to which you are accredited, and to invite it to send its delegates to a preliminary conference which will be held in Rome next May in order to decide on the fundamental principles of the new Institution.²⁵

However, no steps to prepare for the May 1905 conference had been undertaken in the month after the official letter of Victor Emanuel III to Prime Minister Giolitti ‘on the proposal for an International Chamber of Agriculture’ was made public on 9 February.

Furthermore, whilst diplomatic etiquette demanded a positive response to the invitation of the king of Italy, the lack of enthusiasm for the conference quickly became clear: no comparable international organizations existed at the time, and other countries reaffirmed their preference for commercial sovereignty in the agricultural domain. As mediators, the Italian experts had to demonstrate the potential of the new organization, and, from this standpoint, the Central European region assigned to Lorenzoni was a strategic battlefield. Here, the agricultural organizations were puzzled by the project and contacted their Italian counterparts for additional details.²⁶ At the same time, the local agrarian elites were suspicious of the idea initially formulated by Lubin. Some considered that a ‘European Union against America would have been much more popular than that of a Union with American farmers’.²⁷

Lorenzoni arrived in Vienna on 9 March 1905 after visiting Rovereto and Trento, two towns of Trentino that was at that time part of the County of Tyrol, a crown land in the western half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His stay in Trentino convinced him that a major international effort to regulate agricultural markets had to be undertaken. The organi-

²⁴ G. Lorenzoni, *La cooperazione agraria nella Germania moderna. Saggio descrittivo e teorico* (2 vols, 1901–02). Giovanni Lorenzoni was born in 1873, in Fondo, a village of the Trentino region, and was an Italian citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Cf. V. Gioia and S. Spalletti (eds), *Etica ed economia. La vita, le opere e il pensiero di Giovanni Lorenzoni* (2005).

²⁵ *Proclamation*, p. 8.

²⁶ Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, Archivio

di Luigi Luzzatti (subsequently IVSLA, ALL), Sezione 1: Corrispondenza. Serie 3: Fascicoli annuali, UA 40 (1905), Letter of the Director of the Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung für Stand und Bildung der Getreidepreise to Enea Cavalieri, 28 Feb. 1905.

²⁷ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2: Atti. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 30 Mar.–3 Apr. 1905, p. 7 (author’s translation).

zation of the primary sector in this region was already sophisticated, but local organizations were powerless in the face of challenges that could only be overcome through concerted international efforts.²⁸

The existence of common challenges had thus become evident, and Austria was a strategic starting point because its political system placed representatives of agricultural interests in a solid position of power within the parliamentary assembly. However, as soon as Lorenzoni arrived in Vienna, he realized that there was a sense of general mistrust towards the Italian initiative, which had been infused with the ideas of Lubin. While the official statement, authored by Montemartini and Pantaleoni, had failed to reach people, the American businessman was actively promoting the project and, in the absence of plausible alternative voices, debate had come to focus on the two-chamber model that Lubin had identified as the optimal solution for ensuring dialogue between the state and the farmers:

But why not combine these two? Yes; that is better, but how can it be done? By two Houses; – the Lower House, elected by the farmers, and the Upper House, appointed by the governments, or elected by the Lower House.

In fact it seemed to me that the two Houses were necessary; this it would, for instance, permit Denmark to have three delegates to thirty delegates of Austria, so long as in the Upper House both Denmark and Austria had the same number. This would give equity in representation, and this, it seemed to me, could not be more effectively by any other way.²⁹

Despite the attempt to combine the nominal equality of states with the demographic weight of each regional group, the two-chamber model was seen as evidence of the influence of the USA on the project, as Alfred von Hohenblum-Simic, director of the Österreichische Zentralstelle zur Wahrung der land- und forstwirtschaftlichen Interessen beim Abschluss von Handelsverträgen (Austrian Central Office for the Preservation of Agricultural and Forestry Interests in Commercial Treaties), explained to Lorenzoni.³⁰ The Austrian federation had been founded as a temporary union in 1898 with the mission of lobbying the government to implement protectionist policies for agricultural products. In 1903, agricultural member associations decided to transform the union into a permanent representative body that would be in close contact with the public authorities at the local, regional and national levels. Because of its effectiveness, Austrian agrarian groups had envisaged developing this model at the world scale, and advanced this as an alternative proposal for the new international organization.

The Austrians believed that as the Zentralstelle had made it possible to overcome the fragmentation of regional councils, the IIA would be able to pursue and build on the networks of the international congresses of agriculture. Funded by both public and private capital, the new body would be equipped with a permanent committee and executive council and based in Rome for its technical offices. It would have been governed by an itinerant 'Agricultural

²⁸ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento della missione affidata al Prof. Lorenzoni in prò del progettato Istituto internazionale d'Agricoltura', pp. 1–2.

²⁹ FAO, DLA, Part. 1. Sect. 1, doc. 13, p. 3.

³⁰ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 19.

Parliament' comprised a single chamber to which two thirds of the delegates would be selected by agricultural associations and a third appointed by the member states.³¹

During his trips to Vienna and then Budapest, Lorenzoni presented and discussed the Italian proposal with representatives from the agricultural lobbies and agrarian parties of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although the initiative gradually began to attract wider interest, there was still no guarantee of these groups' support. It was necessary to obtain a more explicit commitment, and the opportunity was offered by the meeting organized in Vienna on 19 March 1905, to which Austrian, Hungarian, German, Italian, but also French and Spanish delegates had all been invited. In the reports he sent to Rome, Lorenzoni emphasized the importance of this meeting for the future of the project and requested the presence of a well-known and influential figure – such as Maffeo Pantaleoni or Antonio De Viti de Marco – at the meeting and where he could present the project of the IIA on behalf of the official committee preparing the May international conference.

The representatives of the most important European countries would meet then, but it was impossible to ascertain in advance whether the meeting would be a success. The absence of Henry Saigner, Secretary of the CIA and 'alter ego of Jules Méline', confirmed the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the French towards an initiative that could eventually undermine their hegemonic position in the networks of the international congresses of agriculture. At the same time, German, Austrian, and Hungarian delegates seemed to seek an alternative to the Italian proposal and organized a separate meeting on the eve of 19 March with the following very specific agenda:

The meeting was intended to serve as a platform for discussing the most-favoured nation clause. They would like farmers from all (if possible), or at least the main European states, to take a consistent stand on this issue, setting the stage, in their words, for a European union of agrarian states that could resist transatlantic competition by bolstering its defences against overseas powers.³²

Rather than to coordinate efforts in favour of an international organization defending the interests of agriculture, they were in fact devising a joint strategy to counter competition from American products that had induced the decline of European agricultural prices. Nevertheless, Lorenzoni was still hoping to use the next day's meeting to reach the broadest possible agreement and discuss the programme of the conference scheduled for the following May. He was fully supported in this approach by the deputy Scipione Borghese, who travelled to Vienna for this meeting as a representative of both the Italian government and the Società degli agricoltori italiani (Italian Society of Agriculturalists).³³

This dual delegation aimed to overcome the hesitations of the other countries by stressing the full commitment of Italy and its most prominent agrarian associations in the international initiative for the creation of the IIA. On 19 March in Vienna, Lorenzoni and Borghese were

³¹ Cf. 'Progetto degli agrari austriaci', in *L'iniziativa*, pp. 456–8.

³² IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 28 (author's translation).

³³ Cf. 'Consiglio d'amministrazione', *Bollettino*

quindicinale della Società degli agricoltori italiani (subsequently *Boll. SAI*), no. 9 (15 May 1905), p. 287, and S. Rogari, *Proprietà fondiaria e modernizzazione. La Società degli agricoltori italiani (1895–1920)* (1994).

criticized for both the increasingly diplomatic nature of the project and the exclusion of the agriculturalists' voice from the May conference. Since the project aimed to protect agriculturalists against the power of the industrial, transport and commercial groups, German and Austrian agrarian associations requested the right to participate in debates on the institutional framework and the aims of the new international organization for the primary sector, rather than doing so through their governments. Thus, they were demanding the right to choose their own representatives to the Rome conference and, in the future, to the governing bodies.

As Borghese confirmed, the Italian Preparatory Committee, too, hoped that many, if not most, of the delegates would be single-handedly appointed by the organizations of the agriculturalists. In addition, this mixed form of representation had already been mentioned in the *Note to Diplomatic Agents* circulated with the letter from Victor-Emmanuel III:

The formation of an International Chamber of Agriculture, consisting of representatives elected by the great agricultural Associations, and of delegates appointed by the different Governments, seems to offer a simple and natural means of attaining the desired end.³⁴

This explicit commitment was crucial in helping to garner the support of the participants to the Viennese meeting and secure two outcomes, as Lorenzoni explained in his report.³⁵ First, the misgivings of the German and the Austrian critics were mollified, especially of 'those individuals, parties, and other organizations which are of the greatest importance, without which nothing can succeed, but with which anything can easily succeed'.³⁶ Second, the autonomous and leading role of Italy in the international initiative was finally recognized, and it became clear that 'this issue is now exclusively the concern of HM the King, the Italian government, and the committee, not Lubin'.³⁷

Italy was thus able to claim a pivotal role in the project but was also forced to intensify its preparatory work, especially in response to pressure from the big Austrian and German agrarian organizations, which quickly formalized and submitted their proposals to the Italian Committee in charge of preparatory work for the international conference.³⁸ The German organization Bund der Landwirte (Agricultural League), for example, used the aforementioned Austrian project as a starting point but went even further in its own proposals, where government representatives were relegated to merely consultative roles within a chamber entirely controlled by the delegates of the professional associations. Moreover, it proposed setting up a system in which the number of country representatives would be proportional to the population of each country, which would be classified as either small, medium, or large.

Another, similar meeting took place on 28 March in Berlin, a week after Lorenzoni arrived in the city. The agrarian associations did not make any substantially new proposals but, on the other hand, the German government began to hesitate. In fact, it feared that organizations led by big landholders would eventually use the new international body to exert pressure and to

³⁴ *Proclamation*, p. 6.

³⁵ Cf. 'Per l'Istituto internazionale d'agricoltura. Un'adunanza di agricoltori a Vienna', *Giornale di agricoltura della domenica* (subsequently *G. agr. dom.*), no. 13 (26 Mar. 1905), p. 98.

³⁶ FAO, Records of the International Institute of

Agriculture and the International Forestry Centre (subsequently IIA/CIS), A 3, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 19–22 Mar. 1905, p. 1 (author's translation).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7 (author's translation).

³⁸ *L'iniziativa*, pp. 456–62.

increase their influence on a national scale. In a private conversation with Lorenzoni, Prussian Minister of Agriculture Victor von Podbielski proposed turning the May 1905 conference into a preliminary meeting where professional delegates would be charged with proposing a work programme, to be subject to government review at a future diplomatic conference.³⁹

The key question during the preparatory stage had thus become who, and in what capacity, would be able to participate in both the institution-building and the decision-making processes of the new organization. Giovanni Montemartini, secretary of the Committee preparing the programme of the Rome conference, attempted to mediate in the situation by proposing that a preliminary meeting between the delegates of the associations and unions be held just prior to the diplomatic conference. It would have provided an official channel to the representatives of the rural classes for submitting proposals, thereby indirectly contributing to the design of the IIA.⁴⁰ However, this solution was rejected, and Eugenio Faina, the President of the Committee, decided to impose a compromise that made each country responsible for permitting the participation of its non-governmental representatives in the conference:

In the spirit of the royal letter which had been communicated to foreign Governments, it is desired that 'the important participation of agriculturalists' be carried out within the new organization 'in accordance with the decision of the Governments'. However, stipulating mandatory provisions herein to be applicable to all member States would offend the legitimate sensibilities of Governments and would render the reaching of any agreement impossible.

In order to avoid this problem while maintaining the character of the Institute, which has increased its popularity among farmers across the world, the Italian Government is of the opinion that each State shall be represented in the General Conference of the Institute by a single Delegation, selected in the manner of its own choosing, and that voting shall be performed by delegations rather than individual delegates.⁴¹

In view of the wide variety of institutional contexts and regional farming systems, this solution underscored the diplomatic nature of the meetings and transferred the appointment of the representatives from the various rural classes to each country's government. The agrarian associations and unions were unable to impose an inclusive governance for the IIA. Nevertheless, they introduced crucial questions into public debate on the twentieth-century regulation of social and economic conflicts: what role should be delegated to interest groups in the decision-making that concerned them? Which formal mechanisms could guarantee their participation and ensure consensus without compromising state autonomy in policy-making? Even if ineffective, the models proposed for the IIA could thus be interpreted as an anticipation of the tripartite structure which the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted in 1919, bringing the representatives of the workers and the employers together with those of governments.⁴²

³⁹ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 19–22 Mar. 1905, pp. 32–3. (author's translation).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 30 Mar.–3 Apr. 1905.

⁴¹ *Conférence Internationale d'Agriculture*, p. 22. ⁴² M. Louis, *Qu'est-ce qu'une bonne représentation? L'Organisation internationale du travail de 1919 à nos jours* (2016).

II

The agrarian associations of the major countries played a role in lobbying their governments and overcoming misgivings towards the Italian initiative. Each new association, union or other organization adhering to the project of the IIA increased the snowball effect, resonating both at the local and national levels and even in other countries, as Lorenzoni noted in his reports. The powerful German Bund der Landwirte was one of the main protagonists influencing agricultural debate in Central Europe. Its support was thus essential to ensuring the success of the Italian initiative. Despite the fact that the Bund was also interested in the idea of internationally coordinated action to defend the interests of the primary sector, it had its own vision for the implementation of the project. As was explained before, this organization proposed that only delegates elected by agrarian associations should be allowed to take part in the proposed institute in order to safeguard the autonomy of the economic actors from government interference. At the same time, the Bund was wary of free trade, which it judged as dangerous as interventionism or socialism: while calling for international initiatives, it believed that these initiatives had to be compatible with existing protectionist barriers.⁴³

For this reason, the Bund der Landwirte proposed that the IIA would pursue the mission of the already existing Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung für Stand und Bildung der Getreidepreise (International Agricultural Union for Fixing the Price of Cereals), based in Berlin and led by the German economist Gustav Ruhland. This office was actually 'the first attempt to establish a national statistical database at the European level to help agriculturalists better navigate the grain market'.⁴⁴ Rationalizing the information systems and cereal stock management, it aimed to create 'a great Union of all wheat producers in order to raise the price of this product to the level where customs duties would be completely useless'.⁴⁵

The crisis of European wheat producers caused by competition from American grain imports was a recurring topic of debate at the international congresses of agriculture. In the late 1880s, Ruhland had identified speculation on international markets and pressure from other economic sectors, rather than competition among agriculturalists from different countries, as the root causes of this crisis. Therefore, he insisted that it was necessary to defend producers against the power of American firms and businessmen.⁴⁶ Thanks to his rigid protectionist stance, he became the 'little agrarian god'⁴⁷ and used his economic expertise to support the political battles of the Bund der Landwirte.

Ruhland was convinced of the necessity of collecting data and regulating prices in order to resist the increasing power of commercial groups and commodity exchanges over the dynamics of agricultural prices. For this reason, the German branch of the Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung published regular reports and brought delegates from wheat cooperatives together twice a year to discuss the state and the outlook of the grain markets. Nevertheless, the capacity of these organizations to effect change was limited, and coordinated

⁴³ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 50.

⁴⁴ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 19–22 Mar. 1905, p. 4 (author's translation).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 30 Mar.–3 Apr. 1905, p. 35 (author's

translation).

⁴⁶ E. Laur, 'International agricultural problems', *J. Farm Economics* 6 (1924), pp. 196–211.

⁴⁷ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 26 (author's translation).

international action was viewed as indispensable in compensating for the shortcomings and limitations of national protectionist policies. Certainly, this project would not be possible without interstate agreements, but Ruhland held that a non-governmental alliance among farmers from different countries would also need to be developed.

A number of recent academic works examine how the German approach became a model for modernizing agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century and the years before the First World War.⁴⁸ Here, a vast network of organizations combined centralization with locally based initiatives, and promoted political manipulation, economic assistance and technical rationalization driven by practical sciences.⁴⁹ Agrarian groups thus aimed to defend the place of the primary sector within the increasingly industry-driven national development path.⁵⁰ This also enabled them to orient public policies towards measures that were innovative in terms of their technical and scientific results, but conservative in terms of social justice.⁵¹

Drawing comparisons with France, Nathalie Jas has demonstrated how German Agricultural Experimental Stations began to be used to generate data and to monitor the economic actors connected to primary sector. Their achievements were well known, and other countries tried to adopt this model in order to capitalize on new scientific and technological inputs for developing agriculture.⁵² From this vantage point, the actions of the German office of the Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung could be understood as an attempt to expand the organization-based approach: if experimental stations helped farms to optimize their productive potential, then economic and statistical offices could further efforts to govern the agricultural markets. Consequently, the big German agrarian unions viewed the project of the IIA as an opportunity to adapt and expand this approach of 'regulated modernization' to world agriculture.

The Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung also had branches in other countries, but it had proved difficult for the organization to develop beyond Germany, where its principal strength was the institutional and financial support afforded by the Bund der Landwirte. The fragmentation of the Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung into individual national branches was considered the main factor undermining the efficiency of the organization. In France, for example, the Comité permanent de la vente du blé (Permanent Committee for the Sale of Wheat) chose to maintain its independence, both in terms of funding and work

⁴⁸ See, for instance; N. Jas, *Au carrefour de la chimie et de l'agriculture. Les sciences agronomiques en France et en Allemagne, 1850-1914* (2001), and id., 'Déqualifier le paysan, introniser l'agronome, France 1840-1914', *Écologie et Politique* 31 (2005), pp. 45-55; J. Harwood, 'Research and extension in political context: Rural unrest and the origins of the Prussian Chambers of Agriculture', in N. Vivier (ed.), *The state and rural societies. Policy and education in Europe, 1750-2000* (2009), pp. 135-57; M. Malatesta, *I signori della terra. L'organizzazione degli interessi agrari padani (1860-1914)* (1989); T. W. Guinnane, 'State support for the German Cooperative Movement, 1860-1914', *Central European Hist.* 45 (2012), pp. 208-32.

⁴⁹ See the definition of 'practical sciences' in J. Harwood, *Technology's dilemma. Agricultural colleges between science and practice in Germany, 1860-1934* (2005), pp. 18-19.

⁵⁰ S.-A. Marin, 'Secteur économique mondialisé ou exception culturelle? Les ambiguïtés de l'agriculture allemande à la fin du XIX^e siècle', *Relations internationales* 124 (2005), pp. 3-16.

⁵¹ H. J. Puhle, 'Agrarian movements in German politics (19th and 20th c.)', in P. Villani (ed.), *Trasformazioni delle società rurali nei paesi dell'Europa occidentale e mediterranea (secolo XIX-XX). Bilancio degli studi e prospettive di ricerca* (1986), pp. 159-88.

⁵² Jas, *Au carrefour*.

programmes.⁵³ It is therefore not surprising that, in 1905, the French Comité autonomously expressed its desire to join the project of the IIA and even tried to sway branches in other countries, as attested by its proposal for a preliminary meeting to prepare for the participation of the Internationale landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung at the Rome Conference.⁵⁴

From this point of view, the Italian initiative seemed to constitute an appropriate platform to create a global system for controlling grain prices and establish a permanent organ focusing on truly international questions. Gustav Roesicke, President of the Bund der Landwirte, suggested that the IIA extend the mission of Ruhland's office, because 'it's easier to develop and grow what already exists rather than to create something new *ex nihilo*. This Union could serve as the backbone for a great future construction'.⁵⁵ At the same time, this solution would have recognized the leading role of Ruhland, who considered himself to be the true father of the idea of a global farmers' organization and accused Lubin of plagiarizing his idea of a large-scale system for regulating grain prices.⁵⁶

Although Lorenzoni formally rejected the suspicion of plagiarism, tensions ran high between Ruhland and Lubin, who were both present at the meeting in Vienna on 19 March 1905.⁵⁷ Despite this conflict, Roesicke has shown that German associations approached the Italian proposal with interest and Lubin tried to rally his rival behind the new project. He observed:

Every economist of note will freely admit that Capital is concentrating, is organizing. He will also admit that Labor is organizing, is concentrating, and then must come the conclusion, that the unorganized cannot overcome the aggressive efforts of the organized. Hence it follows that unless Agriculture becomes effectively organized it must become the sport and the prey of the organized.

Realizing all this agriculturalists everywhere are making every effort at effective organization, but without avail. For how can that be effectively organized in a local way, or even through national organization when the factors which govern it are international?⁵⁸

Ruhland was widely recognized for his technical expertise. The Italian Preparatory Committee invited him to put forwards proposals for the future statistical service to be created within the IIA.⁵⁹ Lorenzoni nevertheless advised caution towards a person who held strongly protectionist views and who had been accused of using his position to speculate in agricultural prices. As he wrote in his travel journal after visiting the headquarters of the Internationale

⁵³ On the Union internationale des cours du blé, created in Versailles in 1900, cf. *L'iniziativa*, pp. 511–12, more in general on cereal markets see F. G. von Graevenitz, 'L'Europe comme modèle de l'Office du Blé? Les origines et les conséquences nationales de l'organisation internationale des marchés agricoles (1927–1939)', in A. Chatriot, E. Leblanc and E. Lynch (eds), *Organiser les marchés agricoles. Le temps des fondateurs, des années 1930 aux années 1950* (2012), pp. 51–86.

⁵⁴ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 30 Mar.–3 Apr. 1905, p. 54.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 19–22 Mar. 1905, p. 4 (author's translation).

⁵⁶ *L'iniziativa*, p. 511. Lubin presented the project for the global union for the first time at the 1896 international congress of agriculture in Budapest, at which Ruhland was also promoting his own project for an information and regulatory system at the global level.

⁵⁷ Rossetti Agresti, *David Lubin*, p. 203.

⁵⁸ FAO, DLA, Part. 1. Sect. 1, doc. 13, p. 4.

⁵⁹ G. Del Vecchio, 'L'Unione agricola internazionale e le proposte del prof. Ruhland', in *L'iniziativa*, pp. 569–87.

landwirtschaftliche Vereinigung in Berlin, 'make full use of Ruhland for his technical skills, but don't become involved with him'.⁶⁰

Whereas the participation of the agriculturalists in the governance of the IIA was the subject of lively discussion, the collection of data and the communication of specialized knowledge – on agricultural law, statistics, crop techniques, economic and agricultural sciences – turned out to be potential areas of consensus for creating the new organization.⁶¹ Thanks to its transnational networks, the office directed by Ruhland thus became a model, as both economic actors and the governments agreed on the need to provide new analytical tools that would account for the internationalization of agricultural markets. During his travels, Lorenzoni met several individuals who explained to him how information systems had emerged as strategic assets, making it possible to take the international sphere into consideration and improve the effect of national policies on the primary sector. For example, the President of the Bund der Landwirte proposed using the projected institute to extend the economic service, which some countries provided, through diplomatic and consular representations, to stimulate global trade and foreign investment.⁶² Moreover, representing the Austrian Statistical Bureau, Walter Schiff emphasized comparative studies as a possible domain that could be enhanced through the consistent and rapid circulation of data on agricultural production and markets.⁶³

There was, nevertheless, no reason to limit the system to commodity markets, as the entire primary sector could benefit from a comprehensive system of data collection and circulation. Member of the aforementioned 'Group of the Three' and Director of the Office of Labour at the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce, Giovanni Montemartini, for example, suggested the inclusion of migration in the agenda of the May 1905 international conference. In his meeting with Lorenzoni, Austrian economist Eugen von Philippovich also emphasized the opportunities provided by data collection on migratory circulations. He believed that a global labour exchange would make it possible to control the supply and demand of labour, to stress seasonal complementarities rather than economic competition among the different continents, and to prevent the proletarianization of rural classes in their countries of origin as well as their host countries.⁶⁴ Here, the IIA was envisioned as a centre for expert knowledge-production, serving to organize and better regulate the various import and export markets within the primary sector.

The use of a coordinated information system in order to benefit from opportunities and mitigate the negative consequences (frauds, adulterations, animal and plant diseases, etc.) of more intense economic global activity also emerged as a potential point of consensus for the project of the IIA. Dispatched to Paris with the same mission as Lorenzoni, Edoardo Giretti saw the function of providing statistics as possible ground for reconciling the Italian diplomatic initiative with the French response to it.⁶⁵ On the one hand, proponents of free trade had a favourable view of the project but were concerned about the potential hegemony

⁶⁰ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 19–22 Mar. 1905, p. 36 (author's translation).

⁶¹ Société des Agriculteurs Italiens, *Les Sociétés agricoles et l'Institut International d'Agriculture* (1905).

⁶² IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 40.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁵ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by E. Giretti. On this individual see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 56 (2001), pp. 502–7.

of conservative agrarian forces within the new organization. On the other, protectionists emphasized the need for national sovereignty on import duties but were not clearly opposed to the initiative, even if some of them were concerned about German arguments for the creation of a European customs union.⁶⁶

The 'powerful and conservative'⁶⁷ Société des agriculteurs de France (French Society of Agriculturalists) also ended up joining the IIA project. Despite initial scepticism, the production and circulation of statistical data served as a starting point for discussion. In the end, the Italian initiative encountered favourable circumstances, since the transnational knowledge networks were emerging as a key justification for the specialized institutions, as the President of the French association Melchior de Vogüé wrote to Raffaele Cappelli, his counterpart at the Società degli agricoltori italiani:

It is completely clear that the creation of a proper office, at a propitious place in Europe, whose function would be to periodically communicate data on agricultural production, labour conditions, and plant and animal diseases, would render a great service to agriculture; although the city of Rome may not appear to be, at first glance, ideally positioned geographically to serve as this organization's headquarters, it may attract the greatest support thanks to the advantages it would bestow upon the new institution in the form of the kind and generous patronage of the King of Italy.⁶⁸

Creating a global centre recognized as a legitimate source of authority on data production and dissemination also became issue of primary importance. The large German agrarian organizations unsuccessfully attempted to use this opportunity to relaunch Ruhland's protectionist programme. The French protagonists defended the pre-existing specialized networks of the Congrès internationaux d'agriculture, in which they maintained a hegemonic position.⁶⁹ Former minister Jules Méline, chairman of the CIA, actually proposed transforming the IIA into a permanent office, taking on the function of the international congresses, as 'this would amount to no less than endowing global agriculture with a central organization, a sort of permanent committee charged with lobbying for agricultural interests in the various governments.'⁷⁰ Thus, paradoxically, the Italian proposal was able to gather the support of these countries and to position itself as the third option in the power struggle between France and Germany.

Although the countries' positions differed greatly on the role of state delegates and agriculturalists' representatives in any future organization, emphasis on the regular production of

⁶⁶ FAO, IIA/CIS, A 3, Reports by E. Giretti, pp. 1–4. Henry Sagnier, vice-president of the CIA expressed anxiety about proposals for a European customs union, while the former minister Hippolyte Gomot was not opposed to the idea of a tariff union. For a comparison between the German and French protectionism, see R. Aldenhoff-Hübinger, 'Deux pays, deux politiques agricoles? Le protectionnisme en France et Allemagne (1880–1914)', *Histoire et Sociétés Rurales* 23 (2005), pp. 65–87.

⁶⁷ P. Barral, *Les agrariens français de Méline à Pisani*

(1968), p. 107 (author's translation).

⁶⁸ See the entire letter addressed to Raffaele Cappelli by Melchior de Vogüé, Président de la Société des Agriculteurs de France, in *Société des Agriculteurs Italiens, Les Sociétés agricoles*, pp. 29–34 (author's translation).

⁶⁹ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 1. Serie 1: Fascicoli per corrispondenti, UA 3376 (Rocquigny Robert, de), Letter 23 Mar. 1905 addressed to the assistant of Luzzatti.

⁷⁰ J. M., 'L'Institut international agricole', *La République française*, 13 Feb. 1905 (author's translation).

statistics, technical information and common standards in order to support the growing interactions among farming systems at the global level seemed to be a less controversial foundation for sustainable international cooperation, but the paper by Federico D'Onofrio shows how even this could provoke conflict. Whereas the position of professional actors seemed compromised, Lubin tried to defend his initial idea and transform the International Chamber of Agriculture into an International Commerce Commission, endowed with statistical tools and arbitration capacity. In a letter to Luzzatti, he explained that his model was the US Interstate Commerce Commission:

As you know, each State in the United States has sovereign power, and the United States has only certain and prescribed powers. In the case of interstate matters questions arose which, before the Commission, could not be determined by a State or by the United States, and this brought about the Commission.⁷¹

Whereas pressure from governments and big agrarian associations prior to the May 1905 Conference was the most ostentatiously visible feature of the preparatory phase, greater emphasis on the creation of a sophisticated data and information system reflected the influence of a *nébuleuse réformatrice* drawn from a variety of ideological backgrounds.⁷² These experts and political figures were inspired by the common search for modern instruments that would help them observe social reality in order to design programmes to modernise the agrarian economy. Building on the tradition of enquiries, statistics and surveys, they intended to turn the increasingly internationalized primary sector into a laboratory where the intense production and regular dissemination of statistical data was understood in terms of a new relationship between the state and civil society, an essential tool of market regulation, and a precondition for economic and social policies.⁷³

III

Cooperatives had expanded throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and had developed into a crucial tool to organize agriculturalists, defend their interests and strengthen their voice in markets from the most local to the global. Thus, the Italian proposal of February 1905 could not be ignored by the cooperative movement in either its national or nascent international dimensions. In this section we explain how the movement received the proposal, how it argued for the direct representation of non-governmental interests and its eventual exclusion from direct participation. In response it established its own international institution, the Internationaler Bund der landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften (or Fédération internationale des coopératives Agricoles, the International Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives).

⁷¹ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/3, Letter of D. Lubin to L. Luzzatti, 22 Apr. 1905.

⁷² On the *nébuleuse réformatrice*, see n. 15.

⁷³ A. Desrosières, 'Historiciser l'action publique: l'État, le marché et les statistiques', in P. Laborier and D. Trom (eds), *Historicités de l'action publique* (2003),

p. 213, on the Italian case see F. D'Onofrio, *Observing agriculture in early twentieth-century Italy. Agricultural economists and statistics* (2016), and in general N. Vivier (ed.), *The golden age of state enquiries. Rural enquiries in the nineteenth century, from fact gathering to political instrument* (2014).

The cooperative world was one with which Lorenzoni was already very familiar through the research he had conducted while studying political economics in Vienna with Carl Menger and Eugen von Philippovich and in Berlin with Max Sering. His monograph on the agricultural cooperative movements in Germany was the outcome of detailed observation and analysis of areas where the economically oriented associations were subject to the competing influence of public authorities, unions bringing together small and medium peasants, and the lobbies of the big landholders. In his book, Lorenzoni proposed a framework for a theory of agricultural cooperation, where cooperatives were interpreted both as defensive tools against market failures and the unequal distribution of wealth, and as an offensive and class-based form of association, allowing social groups to organize their interests and influence the market mechanisms.⁷⁴

Under pressure from the Bund der Landwirte, Lorenzoni was aware of the risks of turning the IIA into a 'green lobby', controlled by small number of big agrarian groups demanding economic modernization but actually working to preserve the social hierarchy in the primary sector. Hence, he considered that the participation of the agricultural cooperative movement was crucial to defend a more democratic vision for the international project. He attached great importance to the voice of cooperative federations as the means to gain support from local movements, backed by small and medium peasants. Their involvement was expected to limit the influence of big landholders and help overcome the hesitations of the central government, as can be seen from the weight he gave to the views of the Italian Lega nazionale delle Cooperative, the American Federation of Labor, and the German cooperative federation.⁷⁵

For this reason, Lorenzoni travelled throughout Germany to meet with leaders of the German cooperative movement – both secular and religious – in Westphalia, Rhineland, Hesse, and Bavaria.⁷⁶ This mission was crucial from both a German and international perspective. Following the sixth congress of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) held in Budapest in 1904, German organizations had taken control of the agricultural branch of the international cooperative movement from its British leadership, who were more interested in consumer and worker cooperatives. Rivalry between the British and German ICA members, which was at the same time a fight between the primary and the other economic sectors, finally pushed the agricultural branch to split from the larger body, with guidance from the Reichsverband der deutschen landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften (Imperial League of the Agricultural Cooperatives), the Darmstadt-based German federation led by Wilhelm Haas.⁷⁷

The IIA's initiative capitalized on this internal conflict within the international cooperative movement, which created a window of opportunity for establishing a new international

⁷⁴ Lorenzoni, *La cooperazione*, and the debate based on the book review by G. Valenti, 'Cooperazione di classe!', *Giornale degli Economisti*, serie 2^a, no. 25 (Oct. 1902), pp. 358–75, and G. Montemartini, 'Cooperazione di classe', *ibid.*, no. 26 (Jan. 1903), pp. 63–76.

⁷⁵ The project of the German cooperative was, for example, republished in the journal of the Italian cooperative movement, *La Cooperazione Italiana*, 27 May 1905.

⁷⁶ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, 'Relazione sul compimento', p. 33.

⁷⁷ On Haas and his role in the German agricultural cooperative movement, see T. Sonnemann, 'Haas, Wilhelm', *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 7, S. 378 f, and D. Peal, 'Self-help and the state: Rural cooperatives in Imperial Germany', *Central European Hist.* 21 (1988), pp. 244–66.

specialized alliance for the agricultural sector, as Lorenzoni explained in his reports.⁷⁸ In the months preceding the May 1905 conference in Rome, the leaders of the German federation developed a plan for a cooperative service to be created within the IIA.⁷⁹ This would centre its efforts on the production of updated information (data processing, technical and legislative data on various countries' experiences, etc.) in order to support the development of a global network of cooperatives. At the same time, it would work on a number of transnational issues of concern to agricultural cooperatives including

- (1) credit: with the aim of facilitating the interactions among the central bodies responsible for credit cooperatives in each country in order to encourage access to capital, facilitate public aid applications, and, finally, build a cooperative financial system at the global level;
- (2) collective supply: setting up international societies that would operate on the international markets of the agricultural inputs to combat industrial and commercial power groups, and negotiate agreements directly with input suppliers and traders;
- (3) domestic and international markets: fostering international exchanges and complementarities based on each agricultural region's specialization, conducting sales directly or through cooperative networks, fighting against speculation, fraud, and adulteration;
- (4) production: exploring new technical solutions and economic frameworks that could transform cooperatives into instruments for modernizing both agriculture and rural life.

In order to promote this model within the preparatory debates of the new organization, the cooperative leader Haas was included in the German delegation and took part in the work of the international conference that opened in Rome on 28 May 1905. During the discussions, he openly attacked the idea of making the IIA a solely intergovernmental body because 'as the goal of cooperatives is to do business, he didn't see how this goal could be achieved by involving the state'.⁸⁰ He also participated in parallel meetings intending to lobby and influence the negotiations within the conference, but, in the end, the 1905 convention creating the IIA was a disappointment for the cooperative movement. Fearing the power of the big agrarian lobbies, every form of direct participation of the agriculturalists in the governance of the IIA was excluded. However, the Società degli agricoltori italiani proposed the establishment of an office within the IIA representing all the agricultural cooperative associations and organizations, but even this initiative was abandoned after the international congress of agriculture was held in Vienna in May 1907.⁸¹ The major German and Austrian organizations opposed the proposal, as became clear during the special session at Vienna dedicated to the relationship between the IIA and the movement of the international congresses. In their opinion, limited available resources and the absence of non-governmental coordination would condemn the Office to a subordinate position without the capacity to influence the decisions of the IIA.

⁷⁸ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/2, Reports by G. Lorenzoni, 19–22 Mar. 1905, p. 41.

⁷⁹ *L'iniziativa*, pp. 464–5.

⁸⁰ *Conférence Internationale d'Agriculture*, p. 228 (author's translation).

⁸¹ See the fourth session of the Congress on 24 May 1907 in *VIII. Internationaler landwirtschaftlicher Kongress Wien, 21–25 Mai 1907. Organisation – Bericht über die Kongressberatungen Exkursionsbericht. Band I* (1907), pp. 202–11.

Amongst the tasks of the IIA agreed in 1905 was the duty to 'collect and publish information which might be useful in the various countries in the organization of works connected with agricultural cooperation, insurance, and credit',⁸² but agriculturalists needed to complement the exchange of ideas with the exchange of commodities and traffic. Thus, with the support of the German and Italian federations, an autonomous project aiming at the creation of an international federation of agricultural cooperatives was launched in the weeks following the May 1905 conference.⁸³ The German cooperatives were especially interested in playing a leading role in promoting such an initiative, and the project was discussed during their congress, held in Strasbourg in August 1905. The following year, on 20 April 1906, the Internationaler Bund der landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften was founded in Lucerne (Switzerland) at a meeting chaired by Haas and attended by delegates of the German Reichsverband der deutschen landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften, the Italian Federazione italiana dei Consorzi agrari (Italian Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives), the Austrian Allgemeinen verband landwirtschaftlicher Genossenschaften (General Union of Agricultural Cooperatives), and the Sektion Schweiz des internationalen Bundes (Swiss Section of the International Federation).⁸⁴ The Internationaler Bund intended to enhance the connections and defend the common interests of the agricultural cooperative movement beyond national borders.

Despite the hopes of those who remained committed to the idea of an international chamber of agricultural representatives, the new confederation focused on economic issues and preferred to view its relationship with the IIA as one of total separation and even deliberate ignorance.⁸⁵ At the same time, whilst the Internationaler Bund presented itself as an alliance going beyond national federations, it was dominated by the leagues of agricultural cooperatives from Central Europe. In 1907–08, the Dutch Coöperatieve Boerenleenbank (Farmers' Cooperative Loan Bank), the Savez srpskih zelmjoradničkih zadruga (Central Association of Serbian Agricultural Cooperatives), and the Hungarian Országos Központi Hitelszövetkezet (National Central Credit Union) joined the federation.⁸⁶ Whilst Bulgarian, French, Danish, and Finnish federations also joined the Internationaler Bund in the following years, its German leadership was never contested and this served to affirm the strength of their national cooperative model in both promoting economic efficiency and swaying government decisions. The German hegemonic position within the agricultural cooperative movement aroused apprehension. The Frenchman Alfred Paisant, for example, understood the combination of agricultural associations to be an attempt to create a sort of 'European Zollverein' (European customs union) seeking to expand over the whole continent the common trade and tariff area already in place between the German states.⁸⁷

⁸² Article 9 of the convention signed on 7 June 1905, in Hobson, *International Institute of Agriculture*, p. 328.

⁸³ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 1. Serie 1, UA 3264, Letter of G. Raineri to L. Luzzatti, 22 Sept. 1905.

⁸⁴ See in the *G. agr. dom.*, the following articles: 'Movimento cooperativo agrario in Germania (echi del congresso di Strasburgo)', no. 36 (3 Sept. 1905), p. 281; 'Inizio di efficaci rapporti fra i cooperatori agrari italiani e tedeschi', no. 12 (25 Mar. 1906), pp. 89–90; 'Lega internazionale delle Federazioni agrarie cooperative', no. 17 (29 Apr. 1906), p. 129; 'Per la Lega internazionale

delle Cooperative', no. 45 (11 Nov. 1906), p. 361.

⁸⁵ A. Agresti, 'Un patto di Federazioni agrarie', *La Rivista Verde* 5 (30 May 1906), pp. 6–7.

⁸⁶ Voir 'Il Convegno della Lega internazionale delle cooperative agrarie', *G. agr. dom.* 27 (27 Sept. 1908), pp. 335–6.

⁸⁷ A. Paisant, 'Mouvement coopératif international agricole au moment actuel', *Bulletin des séances de la Société nationale d'Agriculture de France* 67 (1907), pp. 168–76.

The eighth international congress of agriculture, held in Vienna on 21–25 May 1907, gave the Internationaler Bund the opportunity to organize its first general assembly.⁸⁸ By doing so, it attempted to reaffirm its independence from the rest of the international cooperative movement, which was going to meet at the seventh congress of the ICA, planned for 23–25 September 1907 in Cremona (Italy). Agreeing with the approaches that sought a direct participation of the agriculturalists within the IIA, at the 1905 conference Luigi Luzzatti had defended the idea that ‘a world-wide alliance of cooperative societies would do more than all the laws on the statute books to prevent the adulteration of foods, the formation of trusts, and artificial speculation in the staples of agriculture’.⁸⁹ Through the 1907 ICA meeting, he was trying to relaunch the idea of an international alliance of agricultural cooperatives that would operate in harmony and serve as the principal interlocutor of the IIA (whose official inauguration in May 1908 would conclude the three-year preparatory phase). By bringing together in Cremona representatives of the cooperative movements from different countries, Luzzatti hoped to create a joint programme and transform the IIA into a ‘cosy tent’ for the cooperatives of the primary sector.⁹⁰

Pursuing this suggestion, the economist Vincenzo Magaldi presented an action plan to be promoted by the IIA in the areas of cooperation, insurance, and agricultural credit. The aim was to achieve the double objectives of realizing ‘the international organization of production [and] helping cooperative production to conquer for itself the world’s markets’.⁹¹ This mission had to complete the federative model promoted by the Internationaler Bund and integrate a more generalized organizational trend, because ‘in the more advanced European countries cooperation already evinces a tendency to unite its several branches in an international federation or league’.⁹² The establishment of a common organization beyond national borders was intended to serve as both an information service charged with providing regular commercial data and as a central office governing supply and demand in the different markets, monitoring stocks and prices, and preventing the emergence of power positions. At the same time the idea was to encourage mutual knowledge of local initiatives, facilitate the circulation of information and models on the global scale, organize collective forms of regulation on the markets of inputs, credit, insurance, staple foods and agro-industrial raw materials.

Priority was given to technical and economic aspects, but Luzzatti’s attempt at the 1907 ACI congress was not successful in winning over the cooperatives of the primary sector, and the interest of agricultural associations in the IIA waned in Italy and elsewhere. In 1905, the Italian mediators were able to build consensus on the initiative within and outside the

⁸⁸ See ‘Internationaler Bundestag der Landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften, Wien 1907’, in VIII. *Internationaler landwirtschaftlicher Kongress*, pp. 803–4.

⁸⁹ L. Luzzatti, ‘The International Institute of Agriculture’, *North American Review* 182 (no. 594) (1906), p. 655.

⁹⁰ V. Camanni, ‘Le questioni agrarie ai Congressi cooperativi di Cremona’, *Boll. SAI* 21 (15 Nov. 1907), pp. 916–22. Luzzatti proposed the IIA for the second congress of the Internationaler Bund that was finally held on 23–24 Sept. 1908 in Piacenza, where the Federazione italiana dei Consorzi agrari had its headquarters.

During the 1905 conference, Luzzatti talked of the IIA as a ‘tente hospitalière’ for the agricultural cooperative movement, see *Conférence Internationale d’Agriculture*, p. 222.

⁹¹ Report prepared by Vincenzo Magaldi (author), Luigi Luzzatti, Marco Besso, and Giovanni Rainieri (9 June 1907), published in French as *Coopération, assurance et crédit agricoles et l’Institut international d’agriculture* (1909), p. 6. The English text quoted here is the translation published in ‘International Co-operative Alliance’, *Sacramento Union*, 26 Jan. 1908, p. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

country: many voices had responded to the letter written by the king Victor Emmanuel III and many agriculturalists' unions had tried to make their voices heard in the debates before and during the 1905 international conference. However, delays and the direction taken by the project had dampened this initial burst of enthusiasm. Moreover, with the beginning of IIA activities between May and November 1908, it was clear that agrarian unions and cooperative associations had to abandon any hope of participating directly in the new institution, as was explained by Louis Dop, the future French Vice President, during the first General Assembly:

Private associations, labour unions, and cooperatives will thus have to contact their respective governments directly, and it is only through government involvement and mediation that these private organizations will be able to communicate with the Institute. These private organizations' relationship with their government is an issue of *domestic politics*, in which the Institute should not become involved. We recognize the governments, and it is only with them and through them that we will be able to and must be in contact with these private organizations. Any other approach would be improper and would violate the 1905 Convention.⁹³

The following year, the report by the Austrian delegate Victor de Pozzi reaffirmed the separate missions of the Internationaler Bund and the IIA.⁹⁴ The first focused on the economic mission and provided services enhancing the role of cooperatives in the international markets, where the other was oriented towards data gathering and publication, describing the results of the cooperatives rather than supporting their activities. Although collaboration seemed possible between these two distinct and complementary missions, the IIA was in fact imposing the governmental approach onto the method of observing the transnational dynamics of the primary sector. The conflict over the role of professional concerns in the governance of the IIA was therefore transferred to the production and the circulation of data. In the end, even communication remained difficult between the IIA and the unions representing the interests of the agriculturalists. It is therefore important to avoid overestimating the importance of this fracture between the public and the private spheres in the government and in the primary sector at different levels. In fact, the apparent communication gap between the IIA and agrarian associations turned out to be more of a perception than reality. The issue of the representation and participation of agriculturalists in the IIA continued to remain a recurring theme in its four decade-long history. Moreover, if the Internationaler Bund was unable to survive the First World War,⁹⁵ the Commission internationale permanente des Associations agricoles (CIPA) was founded in Rome in 1925 and finally crystallized the relationship between national agrarian associations and the IIA.

⁹³ *Institut international d'agriculture. Assemblée générale. Première session – Novembre 1908. Procès-verbaux* (1908), pp. 30–1 (author's translation).

⁹⁴ IIA, *Comité permanent. Procès-verbaux 1909*, Minute no. 35 of 10 Dec. 1909, 'Annexe I. Rapport de Mr le Chevalier Victor de Pozzi, Délégué de l'Autriche sur la question n. 4 du programme de l'Assemblée générale', *Rapports de l'Institut international d'Agriculture*

avec les fédérations nationales et internationales des coopératives agricoles, pp. 514–18.

⁹⁵ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 2. Agricoltura, UA 148/1, 'Mémorandum concernant une collaboration effective internationale pour la coopération agricole' (1 May 1924), by the Finnish economist, politician and cooperative movement activist Hannes Gebhard.

IV

The convention of 7 June 1905 was signed by delegates from forty countries. It established a 'permanent international institute of agriculture, having its seat in Rome [as] a government institution, in which each adhering power shall be represented by delegates of its choice'.⁹⁶ The mission of expert knowledge production was thus given preference over the initial goal of establishing a global chamber drawing together representatives of the rural classes. According to Raffaele Cappelli, who played a key role in the preparatory phase as president of *Società degli agricoltori italiani*, this initial compromise was necessary to earn the support of all governments and create the IIA.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he considered that the idea of the agriculturalists' participation had to be reintroduced in the future in order to make the new organization effective. Thus, soon after being elected president of the IIA in March 1910, Cappelli wrote to Luigi Luzzatti – who became Prime Minister at the end of the same month – to remind him of the initial project they had shared in 1905 and ask for his help so that 'the Institute would be completed outside the Institute'⁹⁸ through the creation of an international office of agricultural associations.

The idea of creating the IIA as a knowledge institution was the most consensual one and prevented the new organization from infringing upon national sovereignty. Therefore, this model prevailed over the alternative models canvassed at the time, and it emerged as a key aspect of primary sector governance. At the same time, the founding of the IIA brought out two main challenges of twentieth-century projects for economic regulation. First, the increasing impact of international events on governments required the coordination and standardization of information systems, but the design of common technical frameworks was not neutral because it could serve different goals and group interests. Second, although organization and participation emerged as crucial tools to involve non-governmental actors in the public programmes for the agricultural modernization, new forms of representations were also necessary to articulate and negotiate the interests of the different economic and social groups.

While Gilbert and Howe have demonstrated the close interdependence of state and society in building modern agricultural policies, this article has revealed the connections between the two and revised the existing narratives on the origins of the IIA from the point of view of the agricultural associations and unions. This new perspective demonstrates that the birth of the first intergovernmental organization of the primary sector arose out of debates where different models were proposed and discussed, rather than from the isolated initiative of two 'great men'. It has also been a conflictual rather than a consensual history, where both the governments and agricultural unions mobilized the economic role and the demographic weight of the rural worlds to promote and defend their alternative views of international cooperation.

Finally, it has been shown how there was a trans-European history before global history emerged, in which the young Italian nation was able to forge new forms of soft power and create a common ground in opposition to defensive French protectionism and aggressive

⁹⁶ Articles 1 and 2 of the convention signed on 7 June 1905, in Hobson, *International Institute of Agriculture*, p. 327.

⁹⁷ See 'Resoconto dell'assemblea generale ordinaria dei giorni 21–24 Febbraio 1906', *Boll. SAI* 5 (15 Mar.

1906), pp. 146–52.

⁹⁸ IVSLA, ALL, Sezione 1. Serie 1, UA 798, Letter of R. Cappelli to L. Luzzatti, 1 June 1910 (author's translation).



FIGURE 1: Detail from the group photo of the participants at the third General Assembly (14–20 May 1911), taken in front of the building of the IIA at Villa Borghese (Rome). In the first row, from left to right:

Giovanni Raineri (1), Director then President of the Federazione italiana dei Consorzi agrari; Raffaele Cappelli (2), President of the IIA; David J. Foster (3), chairman of the US delegation at the General Assembly, with his wife Mabel Allen Foster (4); Louis Dop (5), Vice President of the IIA.

Behind them, there are the Hungarian delegate Edmond de Miklós de Miklósvár (6), the US delegate David Lubin (7) in the centre, and Hugo Thiel (8, with the white beard and the boater), Director at the German Ministry of Agriculture. Giovanni Lorenzoni (9, without a hat), Chief of the Bureau of Economic and Social Institutions then Secretary General of the IIA, 1912–17 is at the top right

[Source: David Lubin Memorial Library].

German protectionism.⁹⁹ This article has shown that, whilst global food concerns passed from the IIA to the FAO after 1945, the history of the IIA anticipated the trans-European debates on the regulation of market dynamics and schemes for the governance of the rural change, which became one of the pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Aldenhoff-Hübinger, 'Deux pays'.

¹⁰⁰ Clavin, *Securing*, pp. 336–7.