

Rural History in Europe 14

**The Golden Age of
State Enquiries**
Rural Enquiries in the Nineteenth Century.
From Fact Gathering to Political Instrument

Edited by
Nadine VIVIER



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6. The Jacini Enquiry in Italy, 1877–1885

Giuliana BIAGIOLI

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

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two tomes, one in three, plus a special Archive of the ‘Giunta for the Agrarian Enquiry’ in 24 folders, containing many unpublished monographs, at the ‘Archivio Centrale dello Stato’ in Rome.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

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