

### 13.3 Enquiries, agrarian interests and response to economic change in the Atlantic world, c.1860-1900 Room 107

*Convener: Nadine Vivier*

*Chair: Anton Schuurman*

The proposed session is part of a research project included in a GDR (Groupe de Recherche CNRS, France, 2009–12) that focuses on the major enquiries about rural societies in an international comparative perspective. Those major enquiries to be considered in this research project can be defined as followed: enquiries concerning rural society that offered a systematic collection of data regarding a large number of questions about the rural population (peasants, craftsmen) and economic infrastructures. Their answers were given either by experts knowing precise local conditions, or by farmers themselves. These enquiries could have been national in scope, or within part of a federative state. The initiative came from the government, the parliament or from agricultural associations.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of major enquiries throughout Europe and North America (1866 in France, 1877–85 in Italy, 1886 in Spain and in the Netherlands, 1879 in Hungary, 1880 in Ontario, etc.) All through Europe and North America, new technologies began to influence farm production and agricultural organisation; urban development changed the demand for food; the railways integrated national markets and the sharp decline in shipping costs contributed to the first globalisation; while farm labour became increasingly scarce in some economies. Finally changes in political institutions (universal men suffrage or widening) and the distribution of political influence had a profound influence in some societies. This new context prompted states to launch large enquiries.

We aim at understanding the purposes of those enquiries (economical and political purposes). Were they means of knowledge or means of influence on rural populations? To what extent does their management reveal the relations between State, notables and peasants? Who responded to the enquiry, and to what extent were they able to influence the results. How does it reveal the nature of agrarian interests? What were the large landowners' attitudes, and their impact on the conclusions, and the consequences if any? How did rural societies respond to economic change?

The international comparative perspective is a key element of our project: it includes whole Europe and North America, countries that experienced similar conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century. A first session of our project presented in ESSHC Ghent 2010 gathered studies about Canada, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands. The present session in the Rural History conference presents cases studies about Denmark, England, Ireland and Ottoman Empire.

**Nadine Vivier** is Professor of Social and Economic history at the University of Maine. She has worked extensively on rural societies from 1750 to 2000 in France and in Europe. She has recently edited a volume of essays on landowners and agrarian change, *Élites et progrès agricole, XV<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2009).

**Anton Schuurman** is Associate Professor at Wageningen Agricultural University. His research interests include rural modernisation; space and history; cultural heritage; consumer history/material culture; and, more general, processes of social change. Anton Schuurman is research co-director at the N.W. Posthumus Institute for the program *People, Space and Places in History*. He is co-chair of the *Rural History Network of the European Social History Conference*. He is director of the NWO-program *Democratisation and modernisation in the Dutch countryside, 1840-1920*.

#### 13.31 Peter Gray – The development of official knowledge about Irish rural society in the nineteenth century

Official inquiries into the state of rural society began early in the case of Ireland, reflecting both the growing centralisation and interventionism of the colonial state in the nineteenth century, and the

widespread perception (at least after 1829) that the problem of underdeveloped agriculture was the root cause of the agrarian, political and religious agitations that preoccupied British government in Ireland for much of the century. With the exception of the north-east corner of the island, Ireland remained a predominantly rural society throughout the century, with high dependency on agricultural production for both subsistence and export. The risks of overdependence on a single subsistence crop, the potato, were cruelly exposed during the Great Famine of 1845-51, and although a social catastrophe on this scale was rarely envisaged before 1845, strong connections between endemic poverty and Irish agricultural structures and practices had been posited in the previous decades and motivated the commissioning of two major social inquiries in the 1830s and 1840s. The related politicisation of the ‘land question’ in Ireland, which took shape amidst the O’Connellite agitations of those decades, intensified in the post-Famine decades of the 1860-80s, giving rise to further major inquiries on the eve and in the early years of the Irish ‘Land War’ of 1879-82. This paper investigates the motivations, methodologies and outcomes of the four principal Irish social inquiries of this era, the Poor Inquiry Commission (1833-6), the Devon Commission (1843-5), the Richmond Commission (1879-81) and the Bessborough Commission (1880-1). Although ostensibly established to investigate the desirability of a poor law for Ireland, the Poor Inquiry Commission was given an extremely wide remit to uncover the causes of Irish poverty, and significant attention was given to landlord-tenant relations, agricultural practices and wages and related matters, much of it collected through viva voce meetings with cross-class samples of the rural population. The Devon Commission, into the ‘law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland’, was more focused on the ‘land question’, but took large amounts of evidence on the relationship between landholding and farming practice. The Richmond and Bessborough commissions were in effect rival inquiries, the first initiated by an outgoing Conservative, the second by an incoming Liberal government, into the crisis of the late 1870s, and although Richmond’s inquiry reviewed Great Britain as well as Ireland, both were essentially focused on the legitimacy or otherwise of the popular campaign for land reform in Ireland. The paper will argue that each of these enquiries embodied a series of tensions – between political expediency and social-scientific objectivity; between pre-determined and often ideologically-moulded conclusions and social revelation; between the interests of a state that was both liberal and colonial, and the conflicting interests of the colonial landed elite, and an increasingly homogenous (if never uniform) rural population.

**Peter Gray** is professor of modern Irish history and head of the School of History and Anthropology at Queen’s University Belfast. He has previously taught at the Universities of Southampton, Cambridge and Boston College. He has published widely on nineteenth-century Irish history, especially on the history of the Great Irish Famine, on poverty and poor relief, and on British governance in Ireland. His most recent book was *The Making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815-43* (2009).

### 13.32 Ingrid Henriksen – The parliamentary enquiry report in Denmark 1896

The two major parliamentary enquiries in the late nineteenth century, initiated in 1872 and 1894, marked a striking change of focus in the way Danish politicians and the general public thought about land and labour. The main source of information in both cases was the local councils. The Introduction to the 1872 enquiry report explicitly stated as the main problem the:

Concern about the labour question that has arisen both nationally and internationally, a concern that has been kept alive by the recurrent strikes (urban labourers were included in a separate part). Thus the Ministry of the Interior has found it useful to provide information on the living conditions of Danish labourers in order for this to serve as the foundation of measures to remedy the possible deficiencies.

The second enquiry of 1894, though it officially also dealt with rural poverty, was to display the last attempt of the old rural elite, the large landowners, to turn legislation in their favour. Less than ten years after, the political picture had changed completely.

The background for the second enquiry was economic change in the Atlantic World that had massive influence on the Danish countryside in more than one way. The “grain invasion” from the 1870s reinforced the process of transforming Danish agriculture from being a net exporter of grain to an exporter of animal products. This made way for two developments. On the one hand the workload in Danish agriculture was growing in tasks that were labour-intensive and could not be mechanised until decades late, for example, the cultivation of root crops. On the other hand it was seen as a problem from the point of view of the employers that cultivators of small holdings to an increasing degree seemed to be self-supporting. The report suggests that the margin between independence and part-time work for other farmers went somewhere between the possession of two or three cows. Migration out of agriculture that had started in the 1870s surged in the 1880s including overseas emigration lured by higher real wages.

As something radically new the report recommended state loans for the acquisition of small holdings, with an ill concealed agenda, in order to give:

Labourers of limited mean – farm hands and day labourers – a prospect of by thrift and diligence in a suitable age to acquire better living conditions with the greater independence that follows from ownership of a plot of land. At the same time the manpower they have left from tilling their own soil can benefit other holdings at the times of the year when these other holdings need more manpower than that permanently available.

Working with economic history in general **Ingrid Henriksen** has specialised in agrarian history from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Her particular field of interest is institutions, including agricultural co-operatives and rural credit. Some of the results are published in *Economic History Review*, *European Review of Economic History* and *Scandinavian Economic History Review*. I am presently a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the *European Review of Economic History*.

### 13.33 Alp Yücel Kaya – Searching for economic and administrative reforms: the enquiry of 1863 in the Ottoman Empire

In the nineteenth century, especially during the Tanzimat/Reform period (after 1839) the Ottoman central administration introduced the administrative inspection as a tool for information collection in the way of formulating administrative and economic reforms. Enquiries of 1840, 1845, 1850, 1860 and 1863 – in the form of inspections led by inspectors appointed among high-level bureaucrats – served, therefore, as a mean of negotiation between the local notables and the central government. Especially the inspection of 1863 which resulted in the formulation of provincial laws of 1864 and 1867 is an excellent example of this interaction. Four inspectors (Ahmed Cevdet, Abdullatif Subhi, Ahmed Vefik, Ali Riza) went out in 1863 to the Ottoman countryside (i.e. Bosnia, Bulgaria, Western Anatolia and Northern Anatolia) with instructions to analyse local economic and social conditions, inspect local administration, advise on measures to improve communications and agriculture, and reform the conduct of the local councils and village notables. The inspection produced significant suggestions on the administrative and economic reform which would be based on the new configuration of local councils. This paper will therefore analyse the enquiry of 1863 in the Ottoman Empire and question the interaction between the local notables and the central administration as formulated not only in the enquiry but also in the coming administrative reforms.

**Alp Yücel Kaya** studied from 1998 to 2005 at EHESS, Paris and gained a PhD with ‘Politique de l’enregistrement de la richesse économique: les enquêtes fiscales et agricoles de l’Empire ottoman et de la France au milieu du XIXe siècle’,

in 2005. Since 2006, Alp has been Assistant Professor at Istanbul Technical University, Humanities and Social Sciences Department. Publications include ‘Les commissions cantonales de statistique sous le Second Empire’, *Le Canton – Un territoire du quotidien dans la France contemporaine (1790-2006)*, (ed. Y. Lagadec, J. Lebihan and J.-F. Tanguy), 2009 and ‘In the Hinterland of Izmir: Mid-nineteenth century traders facing a new type of fiscal practice’ in *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire* (ed. by S. Faroqhi and G. Veinstein), 2008.

### 13.34 James Simpson and Juan Carmona – Enquiries in Spain

This paper looks at the major government enquiry of 1887–9 in the context of long-term changes in the nature of Spanish agriculture, and the changes in the international economy. It shows that on the eve of the 1880s, the Spanish state possessed very little information concerning the sector. In particular, there were still no official figures for farm output, and figures for factor inputs were limited. A critical look is provided of the Enquiry, both in terms of what information the government sought to collect, and what was not considered as being important or relevant. Finally a brief look is given to the major changes that took place concerning the role of the state in the decade or so following the Enquiry. The authors suggest that while many farmers exaggerated the extent of the effects of the international crisis on Spanish agriculture, farmers were successful in achieving an increase in tariffs which helped keep much of the sector profitable, at the cost of higher domestic prices. However, the Enquiry was also instrumental in encouraging the state to participate much more in the sector, especially in providing statistical and other information concerning production.

**Juan Carmona** (JC) has Ph.D in contemporary history, University Complutense, Madrid. He is a lecturer at the UC3M. He has published articles in the *Journal of Economic History*, *Continuity and Change*, *European Review of Economic History* (2011), *Revista de Historia Económica* and *Agricultura y Sociedad*, etc.. He is author (with James Simpson) of *Laberinto de la agricultura española* (PUZ, 2003). At present he is working on agrarian contracts, especially sharecropping in the Spain and France, land reform in Spain during the Second Republic and land markets.

**James Simpson** (JS) has a PhD from LSE. He is now Professor of Economic History at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. He has published papers in the leading economic history journals, and is author of *Spanish agriculture: the long siesta, 1765-1965* (1995, Spanish edition, 1997), and *Creating Wine; the Emergence of a World Industry, 1840-1914* (forthcoming September 2011).

### 13.35 Nicola Verdon – Agricultural reports on the household budgets and living standards of agricultural labourers’ families (1864–1914)

The British economy was in a state of flux in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A period of mid-century stability and prosperity, when Britain was labelled the ‘workshop of the world’, came crashing down in the 1870s and 1880s when trade slumps, increased foreign competition and cheap imports all undermined Britain’s position as the world’s preeminent economic power. Large-scale unemployment and workers unrest followed, with a series of strikes in urban industries the 1880s. The agricultural sector was also affected and entered into a period that historians have traditionally characterised as the ‘great depression’. The government response included the setting up of a major enquiry, to analyse the state of labour relations and work patterns in the key industries. This was published over the course of 1892–4 as The Royal Commission on Labour. This enquiry included several volumes on the agricultural labourer. This paper will analyse the content of these reports from England. They were conducted on a county basis, with one Poor Law Union within each county chosen for investigation. They examined issues relating to work patterns and wage levels, the role of women in agriculture, the provision of housing and allotments as well as the general condition of the agricultural labourer and ‘master-man’ relationships. The paper will analyse what these reports tell us about the state of the agricultural labourforce in England in the last decades of the nineteenth century and how the information they contain can be used by historians.

## RURAL HISTORY 2010

**Dr Nicola Verdon** is currently Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sussex. Her main research focus is on the economic and social history of the British countryside since 1800 and she has published widely on female and child labour in agriculture, on other aspects of male work and wages, and on the household economies of farming families. Main publications include a monograph (*Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages*, Boydell, 2002) and recent articles in *Economic History Review* (2008), *Historical Journal* (2009), *Agricultural History Review* (2009) and *History Workshop Journal* (forthcoming 2010). She is currently secretary of the British Agricultural History Society. □