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THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONTROL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
AGRICULTURE

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ON JUNE 7, 1930, the International Institute of Agriculture concluded its twenty-fifth year of existence. Although there is a greater demand now than ever before for the services which the Institute was intended to render, there is a widespread opinion that it has not embraced its opportunities. Its abilities are questioned. Discussions in the last General Assembly indicated that the record of its twenty years' existence is not such as to inspire confidence. Agricultural interests are turning to other international groups for services which the Institute might reasonably be expected to furnish. What are the causes of this situation? The usual explanation put forward by the administration is scarcity of funds. But this plea lacks conviction when one appreciates that the budget of the Institute for the period since 1925 is larger than for any similar period in its history. International agricultural problems are deserving of larger financial support than that accorded the Institute. But experience indicates that governments will be slow in according such support until the Institute demonstrates its ability to expend efficiently the funds at its disposal. There is reason to suspect that lack of funds is a result and not the cause of the present situation. One must look to administrative practices for an explanation.

There is reason to believe that certain methods employed in the management and control of the Institute are in substantial violation of the treaty establishing that organization. In some essentials it has ceased to be international. Scientific and technical interests tend to become submerged in political and diplomatic considerations. It is evident that the authors of the treaty had in mind a purely scientific fact gathering agency. Furthermore the treaty was designed especially to prevent control by the representatives of one or a few nations. That the plans of the founders have gone astray cannot be attributed to faulty workmanship on their part. Rather has the present situation come about through a failure to follow the principles laid down by them and embodied in the convention of 1905.

This convention places the control of the Institute under the supervision of two bodies. Executive authority is entrusted to the Permanent Committee—the governing board—composed of one representative from each adhering nation. In theory this committee is expected to enforce the policies formulated by the General Assembly—the legislative body. To quote the treaty, “the general assembly shall exercise supreme control over the international institute of agriculture.” First let us turn our attention to the Permanent Committee.

The treaty specifies that the president shall be elected by the Permanent Committee from among its members. But since the founding of the Institute this position has been held by the representative of Italy. This practice which has gathered the force of custom deprives the governing body of the control of this officer. Since the representative of Italy is automatically elected president, he is in reality appointed and dismissed by his government, and responsible only to that government. This situation has given rise to difficulties. David Lubin, the American representative on the Permanent Committee, in his first annual report to the State Department in 1909, accurately described the situation when he states that “Like all strong men, the President of the Institute has some decided opinions. He is of the opinion that the chief executive of this Institute should really be the ‘Institute,’ that the Permanent Committee ought merely to act as his advisers. In fact, he considers that his prerogatives as President of the Institute should be similar to those of the President of the United States toward his Cabinet. . . .”

Nearly twenty years later the American delegate reported to his government that the representative of Italy, as President of the Institute “insisted that his position automatically confers upon him the chairmanship of all standing committees and auxiliary organizations.” He holds the following Institute positions:

1. President of the Institute.
2. Chairman of the Finance Committee.
3. President of the Joint Consultative Committee with the International Labour Office.
4. President, International Scientific Agricultural Council.
5. President, General Assembly of 1926.

This would be somewhat akin to a situation where the Speaker of the House of Representatives held the chairmanship of all standing committees of that body. The American delegates reporting were different individuals. Presidents had also changed. Unfortunately, policies of administrative control remained much the same.

The General Assembly formulates the policies to be carried out by the Permanent Committee. Without doubt it is an open violation of the spirit of the treaty for the President of the Committee to occupy also the position of President of the Assembly—the supervising agency of the Committee. The fact that the President of the Committee insisted in the name of his government that he be made President of the Assembly does not promote the cause of international cooperation.

By the terms of the treaty, the Permanent Committee shall appoint and remove all members of the staff of the Institute, but because of influences exercised largely through diplomatic channels, the Secretary-General, the scientific directing head of the organization, has always been of Italian nationality. The first President put forward an employee of the Italy Foreign Office, one wholly without agricultural training or experience, as a candidate for the first Secretary-General. Mr. Lubin, the American representative, reports that "a decided protest was expressed to me by the leading members of the Permanent Committee against this candidate. Presently, unwarranted, significant, extraneous pressure was exerted, which forced this opposition to dissipate and result in the election of said candidate to the post of Secretary-General of the Institute." The same significant extraneous pressure is still exerted in the election of Secretary-Generals. This lack of freedom of choice of its scientific director tends to weaken the control of the Permanent Committee over his activities. Repeated attempts to restore to the Permanent Committee its right of unrestricted freedom in the selection of its chief executive officer have failed. The Permanent Committee has become an acquiescing rather than a supervising and controlling body. It is not a deliberative group exercising full freedom of discussion.

The question naturally arises as to why the Permanent Committee, composed of government representatives should permit control to pass from its hands. This is explained by an analysis of the make up of the Committee. It consists of:

- 15 Italians (no other nationality has more than one representative).
- 26 diplomatic delegates resident in Rome accredited to the Italian government—ambassadors, ministers, consuls, and so forth.
- 8 special agricultural delegates, of whom only 4 reside in Rome. The other 4 reside in their respective countries.

The following states are represented by Italians:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. Bolivia | 9. Cyrenaica |
| 2. Columbia | 10. Italian Somaliland |
| 3. Costa Rica | 11. Tripoli |
| 4. Ecuador | 12. Nicaragua |
| 5. Guatemala | 13. Paraguay |
| 6. Haiti | 14. Peru |
| 7. Italy | 15. San Marino |
| 8. Eritrea | |

The fact that some of these countries are far in arrears in their payments to the Institute has not limited the votes cast in their name. Added to this situation the fact that a high official of the Italian foreign office is President of the Institute makes it evident that the wishes of the President will prevail if he chooses to approach the diplomatic delegates through his foreign office contacts.

Now let us turn our attention to the General Assembly, the body which according to the treaty has "supreme control" over the Institute. The American delegation secured the adoption by the 1924, 1926 and 1928 General Assemblies of resolutions designed to place the management and control of the Institute on an international basis. The results of these efforts are well illustrated by the developments which have taken place during and since the last General Assembly.

The American Delegation to that Assembly restated the desires of its government. They were:

"The American Delegation believes it to be highly essential that this Assembly take definite action designed to assure adhering Governments that they will not again be faced with the troublesome issue of international control of executive responsibility. Such assurance requires the adoption and the faithful execution, in spirit as well as in letter, of three fundamental principles which are embodied in the following resolutions:

1. That the duties of the office of President of the Permanent Committee be limited largely to those of presiding officer;
2. That the executive responsibility be placed in the hands of the Secretary General operating under the direct control and supervision of the Permanent Committee;
3. That the Permanent Committee be permitted to exercise unrestricted freedom in the selection and dismissal of its chief executive officer, the Secretary-General."

These principles are based upon the simple philosophy that since the President is appointed and dismissed by his government and responsible only to that government, he is not subject to the control of the Permanent Committee—the governing body. For that reason he should not exercise executive authority. Executive authority should be vested in one employed by the Permanent Committee and responsible to it. This executive should be chosen without restrictions as to nationality.

In a large measure the 1928 General Assembly accepted the above principles, but even the most optimistic would hardly say that they have been applied in good faith. An enumeration of significant events will furnish an indication of the reception accorded these principles by the administration of the Institute.

1. During the closing minutes of the final meeting of the Assembly the Italian Delegation issued a blanket reservation regarding its acceptance of the work of the Assembly. This reservation implies that the Italian Government considers itself free to reject any or all acts of the Assembly. The reservation reads:

"During the present General Assembly, divergences of opinion have arisen on various fundamental questions of interpretation concerning articles of the Convention and provisions of the Statutes. Considering the declarations made by some delegations which affect important problems of principle, and which cannot meet with the full approval of the Italian delegation, the latter—referring also to the position taken by it during the discussions and when votes were taken—wishes to declare that its attitude is designed to leave to the Government which it represents full and entire liberty of action with regard to the decisions that it will ultimately take."

It is clear from the position taken by the Italian Delegation in the Assembly that the reservation is pointed toward the intention, or at least the possibility, of rejecting certain acts of the Assembly. In fact, the Italian Government has already repudiated the article in the statutes ratified by the last General Assembly giving the subcommittees the right to elect their own officers.

2. The President is an employee of the Italian Government and responsible only to that government. The 1928 General Assembly decreed that he should limit the duties of the office of President to that of a presiding officer. As late as January 18, 1929, the President formally communicated a written statement to the Finance Committee announcing that his Government insisted that the President of the Permanent Committee be *de jure* President of the Finance Committee. The Statutes of the Institute grant and have always granted to the subcommittees of the Permanent Committee the right to elect their own officers. This statute was reaffirmed by the 1928 Assembly. Yet the President at his own insistence is chairman of every standing subcommittee and auxiliary organization. This procedure is contrary to the spirit of the Statutes, and to precedent. It violates accepted international principles as well.

3. The keystone principle advocated by the American Delegation and adopted by the Assembly pertains to the right of the Permanent Committee to select its chief executive officer—the Secretary General—without restrictions as to nationality. This resolution was acknowledged to be a dead letter at the time of its adoption. Never had the Italian foreign office used its diplomatic influence more openly and so determinedly as it did a few days preceding the General Assembly. It informed a number of foreign diplomatic missions in Rome that it would denounce the Treaty and withdraw the building from the use of the Institute were a “foreigner” elected to this position. Under the circumstances no responsible “foreigner” could be expected to permit his name to be put in nomination, nor can it be recommended seriously that he do so, until there is assurance that all nationalities will be judged on the same basis.

Only candidates of Italian nationality were approached or seriously considered by the nominating committee. No effort was made to get in touch with “foreign” candidates.

The issue is not that the Secretary-General shall be other than Italian. It hinges on the basic principle that the Permanent Committee shall be free to make its own choice without consideration as to nationality. The essential point is that the Permanent Committee supervise and control the Secretary-General, which control in the last analysis is inseparable from the power of appointment and dismissal. Without this freedom of selection of the directing

head of the Institute, the three principles involved in the American demands are greatly weakened. They must stand or fall together.

The nullification by the administration of the Institute of instructions of the Assemblies and of certain statutes governing the activities of the Permanent Committee has convinced the government of the United States that the machinery created by the treaty for the control and management of the Institute is inoperative. It has ceased to function with regard to the application of certain principles of international cooperation. For this reason the Institute has been notified that the United States under prevailing conditions has "ceased to be interested in participating in the affairs of the Institute, or contribute toward its financial support in excess of the obligations specified in the treaty of 1905." Governments can not be expected to exhibit any considerable degree of enthusiasm for an international undertaking which persists in violating fundamental principles of international control.