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# Between ideas and interests. The end of the Spanish free trade movement, 1879-c. 1903\*

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## Introduction

The discontent among many Western voters with globalization and the recent success of certain populist candidates in exploiting this sentiment have rekindled the academic interest for past protectionist backlashes. In fact, as O'Rourke (2019) indicates, economic historians have already produced an abundance of literature on two previous anti-globalization episodes, namely, the protectionist backlash in the late nineteenth century and the disintegration of the world economy in the 1930s. Central to this literature is the argument that past backlashes were rooted in the grievance of economic interests threatened by the distributional effects of globalization. According to Rodrik (2018), "Prior to the welfare state, the tension between openness and redistribution was resolved either by large-scale emigration of workers or by reimposing trade protection".<sup>1</sup> An example is the failure of continental Europe to continue the opening up process initiated by the signing of the Cobden-Chevalier treaty in 1860.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Rodrik (2018), p. 204.

2. This failure contrasts with the long-lived movement of Western countries towards freer trade after WWII, only possible due to the compensating safety net programs then implemented. For a detailed formulation of the compensation hypothesis, see Rodrik (1998).

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However, as Rodrik (2018) and O'Rourke (2019) have recently highlighted, the political economy of trade does not tell the whole story of why the efficiency principle of free trade has been repeatedly sacrificed to the use of protectionism as a re-distributional tool. Interests are a key element but not enough to explain, for instance, the broad reversal in liberal trade policies that followed the approval of the German bill in 1879. In Rodrik's words, the general public's "perceptions of self-interest are always filtered through the lens of ideas".<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, interests alone could not sufficiently explain the widespread opening-up movement that took place in Western Europe towards the middle of the nineteenth century. For Kindleberger (1974), the co-movement to free trade in the 1850s in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, along with those registered in the UK, France, Germany and Italy some years earlier, suggested "the possibility that Europe as a whole was motivated by ideological considerations rather than economic interests".<sup>4</sup> Along the same lines, Trentmann (1998) defends the formative role of ideas in shaping interests to help us understand the survival of free trade in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the same way as Schonhardt-Bailey (2006) when explaining the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Crucial to this formative role of ideas was the activism of a number of organizations involved in the diffusion of the free trade principle. The campaigns of the Anti-Corn Law League and, later, the Cobden Club – which Howe (1997) described as an "ideological lobbying group" – were critical to spreading the virtues of free trade, winning over the general public and, eventually, influencing the British political economy.<sup>5</sup> From the beginning, these organizations were seen as an example to imitate on the continent, where similar entities soon sprang up.<sup>6</sup>

Focusing on continental Europe, this paper aims to shed light on why the same organizations that had contributed to creating a pro-free trade climate in the middle of the century showed no resistance to the general rise of customs of the 1880s. This is the case of the French Association pour la Défense de la Liberté Commerciale, whose activism faded after 1882, as also occurred in Germany with the Kongreß der deutschen Volkswirte (German Economic Congress), which formally disappeared in 1885. The international congress on Tariff Reforms and Work Regulations, held in Anvers in 1892, underlined

3. "In truth – for this author – we do not have interests. We have ideas about what our interests are." Rodrik (2018), p.163.

4. Europe should be considered as, the quote continued, "a single entity which moved to freer trade for ideological or perhaps better doctrinal reasons". Kindleberger (1974), p. 46.

5. Howe (1997), p. 116.

6. For a summary of the European pro-free trade associations in the middle of the nineteenth century, see Augello and Guidi (2001).

how, by then, only two pro-free trade organizations, the Belgian and the Spanish, were still alive.<sup>7</sup> Its longer survival, in our view, makes the *Asociación para la Reforma de los Aranceles de Aduanas* (ARAA, Association for the Reform of Customs Tariffs), an organization worthy of study in that, by comparison, it may help us understand the lack of any strong articulated response in support of free-trade ideas in the rest of the large continental countries at the crossroads of the 1880s.

The *Asociación*, created in 1859 and dissolved in 1869 due to internal disensions, was reconstituted in 1879 in response to concerns raised by the European protectionist backlash.<sup>8</sup> But, so far, the life of the *Asociación* after 1879 remains a somewhat unexplored field. It is mentioned very rarely in recent studies on trade policy and economic thought at the end of the twentieth century. There is no systematic examination of its activities, not even a precise date for its dissolution, since its archives are lost. The reconstruction of the *Asociación's* composition, campaigns, and arguments has required an extensive search for its regular publications – scattered across several libraries and archives – and its executive board minutes – drawn from contemporary newspapers. This task also included the examination of official trade policy documents that may give an indication of the *Asociación's* stance. The results from this search can be summarized as follows.

We have found that reported references to the *Asociación* declined sharply from 1894 onwards, the last dated in 1903. In its second phase, it gathered a group of free trade academics and businessmen, whose occupational and political profiles, as we will document below, were not unlike those of the members of the *Association pour la Défense de la Liberté Commerciale*, the German Economic Congress or even the Cobden Club. As had occurred in Germany and the UK itself, the academic defense of free trade evolved in a possibilist sense, renouncing unilateralism and accepting reciprocity. Also mirroring the arguments used in the Cobden Club and the German Economic Congress, the *Asociación* insisted on the moral-political conception of free trade and underlined its utility as a tool against rent-seeking by vested interests. Likewise, there were no differences in the campaign and propaganda procedures. In short, no kind of Spanish idiosyncrasy in terms of composition, arguments or procedures is able to explain the vitality of the *Asociación* in the 1880s.

Having discarded this hypothesis, the explanation for its exceptionality had to be found outside the organization, the trade cycle asynchrony of Spain with countries such as France or Germany being a good candidate. Due to a number of factors, the liberalization resulting from the dense network of bi-

7. Congress International d'Anvers sur la législation douanière et la réglementation du travail (1893), p. 424, vol. II.

8. See Serrano Sanz (2017) for the reconstructed activism of the *Asociación* in 1859-1869.

lateral commercial treaties signed by most European countries in the 1860s was delayed in Spain until the late 1870s. The commercial treaties began to have a positive impact on the Spanish economy in the 1880s, when the general public perceived them in a positive light as compensation for the sacrifices that had to be made by the less efficient manufacturing sectors. This is why, as the press reported, public opinion supported the *Asociación*, which, fostered by this support, developed strong activism in favor of liberalization in the same decade as its continental counterparts faded.

But, when in the early 1890s, for reasons later explained, the renewal of the Spanish treaties proved to be unfeasible, export free trade interests lost relevance in relation to import competing interests and public opinion withdrew its support for the *Asociación*. Most importantly, based on this loss of support from public opinion –acknowledged in the *Asociación*'s meetings and widely echoed in the press, even traditionally pro-free trade newspapers– Spanish policy-makers prioritized the re-imposition of protection over the alternative of allowing large-scale emigration.

If we use the words of Mill, a “good cause seldom triumphs unless someone's interest is bound up with it”,<sup>9</sup> the loss of this someone's interest (wine exporters, in the Spanish case) helps to explain why the ideological free trade defenders within the *Asociación* stopped fighting publicly for the cause. Being liberals, they were radically opposed to any labor-pack compensation, so once emigration won over public opinion to instead of from protectionism, the academics of the ARAA accepted the practical defeat of their ideas. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the international framework; Section 3 presents the professional and political profiles of the members of the *Asociación* and Section 4 reports its activity and arguments. Section 5 chronicles the *Asociación*'s disappearance. The main conclusions are drawn in Section 6.

### **European free traders at the end of the nineteenth century**

As mentioned above, a number of organizations were highly active in the diffusion of free trade ideas in nineteenth century Europe. Among them, the Cobden Club played a pivotal role. The activism of this club as an “ideological lobbying group” pressing for free trade is well recorded in Howe (1997). Since its foundation in 1866, the Club assumed the defense of free trade through dinners, lectures in large towns, essay competitions, and the distribution of regular publications of Cobden's writings and speeches as well as those of other local and foreign authors on the subject. In its first ten years

9. Cited in Kindleberger (1974), p. 23.

of life, the Club distributed more than a hundred thousand copies of tracts and books.<sup>10</sup> Its activity would even reach new heights in the following decade when exceptional efforts were made to counteract the regained strength of protectionist forces both at home and abroad.

The European depression that began in 1873 stimulated the demand for tariffs in Britain under the fair trade movement. Meanwhile, the shrinking effects of the crisis on the Continent, together with the increase in war-related expenditure, made the idea of reinforcing customs duties as a source of public revenue more attractive to policy-makers. Proof of the changing atmosphere in the 1870s resides in the difficulty encountered by the British in negotiating the renewal of the European network of commercial treaties, of which the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty constituted the cornerstone. In response to this protectionist revival, the Cobden Club embarked on a popular campaign of “immense proportions”<sup>11</sup> to capture the new rural vote created by the Reform Act of 1884. This agitation gave rise to the printing and distribution of millions of leaflets in a propaganda campaign that reached its peak in the electoral year of 1885. According to Howe (1997), this year was the electoral high-water mark of the Club, which, after 1886, would see its political unity broken by divisions on the issue of Irish Home Rule. Membership declined and, although the Club’s international presence continued, its involvement in significant free trade agitation in Britain did not resume until the reaction against the protectionist campaign launched by Chamberlain in May 1903.<sup>12</sup> In the period 1903-1906, taking advantage of the celebrations of the centenary of Cobden’s birth, the club promoted publications, meetings (more than 60), public demonstrations, cartoons, and even propaganda films.<sup>13</sup> By then, however, the activism of associations devoted to the mobilization of public opinion against the menace of protectionism had long faded in the large continental European countries.

In the 1870s, French political economists developed an intense campaign to sway public opinion in favor of free trade. The Société d’économie politique organized popular meetings all over the country, while the founding of the weekly *L’économiste français*, edited by Leroy-Beaulieu, sought to gain

10. 134,854 according to Howe (1997), p. 124.

11. Howe (1997), p.130.

12. According to Howe (1997), the Club’s dinner was revived in 1902 (for the first time since 1897) to discuss the prohibition of sugar imports. Apart from its opposition to attempts to prohibit sugar imports (1888-1899, 1902), the Cobden Club opposed the proposal of imperial preferences on the basis of discriminatory duties on foodstuffs to the detriment of third countries (1901-1902) and the restoration of duties on corn and meat to finance the Boer war-related spending (1899-1902). But it would not be until the reaction against Chamberlain’s protectionist campaign launched in May 1903 that the Club declared a propaganda war of proportions comparable to that of the early 1880s.

13. Howe (1997), p. 231.

the favor of professionals and businessmen for the cause.<sup>14</sup> The free trade offensive for the control of public opinion reached its peak with the constitution of the Association pour la Défense de la Liberté Commercial (Free Trade Association) in June 1878. This Free Trade Association brought together publicists, politicians and businessmen with foreign trade interests and spread free trade ideas by organizing conferences and rallies, distributing leaflets on a large scale and taking advantage of regular support from the Paris dailies. However, after its success in frustrating the rise of industrial tariffs in the bill of 1881, it disbanded in June of the same year before the conclusion of the new trade treaties. Most importantly, it did not reappear when, following the reform of 1881-1882, a well-organized campaign for protectionism, especially after the alliance of the Association de l'Industrie française and the Société des Agriculteurs de France in 1888, was ostensibly gaining ground.<sup>15</sup> There was no parallel activism on the free trade side. In 1890-1891, free traders continued to support their doctrine in parliament, but they never ran a lobbying campaign at the national level again.<sup>16</sup> The French struggle against protectionism was then left in the hands of pure economic interests, most of them organized through chambers of commerce in cities linked to export businesses.<sup>17</sup>

In Germany, since its foundation in 1858, the Manchester School was represented by the Kongreß der Deutschen Volkswirte (Congress of German Economists).<sup>18</sup> Conceived as a forum to promote free trade ideas and made up of professional economists, publicists, and export-related businessmen, the Kongreß used its annual meetings and, above all, the activities of its core members (through conferences, pamphlets and different types of publications) to support the signing of the French-Zollverein's treaty and ensuing tariff reductions in the 1860s. The Kongreß's propaganda, through free trade manifestos and

14. For a detailed account of the campaign of free traders in France in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Smith (1980).

15. A good description of the common propaganda campaign carried out by the Société des Agriculteurs de France and the Association de l'Industrie française can be found in Baral (1974). For the crucial role played by the Société des Agriculteurs through the Syndicate Economique Agricole, see Golob (1944). On the basis that "great movements of opinion do not occur by themselves", the Syndicate published a weekly paper *Le Démocratie rural*, toured the country addressing public meetings to display the virtues of protection and, above all, made sure that the candidates in the election of 1889 signed the letter sent by the Syndicate declaring their support of the protectionist cause.

16. Smith (1980), pp. 203 and 234.

17. Golob (1944), p. 205.

18. See Hagemann (2001), pp.152-175. According to this author, the figure of Prince-Smith was instrumental in the foundation of the Kongreß, who, by 1858, had been engaged in the promotion of free trade in Prussia-Germany for two decades. His goal of founding a permanent propaganda society led to the constitution of the Scientific Society for Trade and Industry in Berlin in 1847. This society, soon renamed the Free Trade Union, became a model for a string of societies set up in the big trade cities in Prussia, all coordinated after 1849 by the short-lived Central Association for Free Trade. See Henderson (1950), pp. 295-302.

demonstrations, was also prominent in the months leading up to the passing of the protectionist bill in 1879.<sup>19</sup> However, the historiography makes no mention of any campaigns of the Kongreß opposing the increasing protectionist reforms of the 1880s. In fact, the Kongreß was dissolved in 1885 and, from then on, new references to meaningful free trade activism would be exclusively related to very specific interests, namely, those of the Commercial Treaties Association, a group of businessmen determined to achieve a tariff reduction of the 1902 bill through international negotiations.<sup>20</sup> Similarly to France, following the 1879 shift towards protectionism, the defense of free trade in Germany also retreated to the realm of universities and scholarly journals.<sup>21</sup>

In Italy, until the protectionist backlash of 1878, free trade was an uncontested principle among economists and politicians so it did not constitute a central issue in the economic associations.<sup>22</sup> However, following the reinforcement of tariffs in 1887, two free trade associations were formed, the Associazione per la Libertà Economica in 1891 and the Associazione Economica Liberale in 1892.<sup>23</sup> The first was constituted in Milan with the goal of defending economic freedom and, in particular, free trade “for the benefit of consumers, producers, merchants and exporters”.<sup>24</sup> The majority of its founding members represented silk textile interests, although there were also lawyers, publicists, and a good number of renowned economists, including Pantaleoni and Pareto. Through open conferences and regular articles in the press, the Associazione per la Libertà Economica set out to turn “the popular classes” against protection.<sup>25</sup> However, its activism ceased in 1895. Free trade was also the cornerstone of the founding program of the Associazione Economica Liberale.<sup>26</sup> Established in Rome, this Associazione brought together economists (civil servants and politicians), publicists, and non-cereal landowners

19. The activism of the free trade circle of the Kongreß until 1879 is thoroughly reported in Dawson (1904) and Lambi (1963).

20. In his classic *Protection in Germany*, Dawson (1904), pp. 159-160, underlines the “practical protest” of the Commercial Treaties Association that, in 1902, “had nearly 20,000 members, who as industrialists and merchants employed 1,500,000 people though they claim to represent the economic interests of three times that number, without taking into account the consuming public”. This pro-treaty activism at the turn of the century contrasted with the lack of agitation surrounding the German negotiations of the early 1890s. Dawson attributes the conclusion of the network of treaties in 1892-1893 to Count von Caprivi and his detailed account of the fierce opposition that negotiations aroused among agrarian interests makes no mention of any parallel free trade campaign. See also Torp (2015). The German stimulus for negotiations, in this author’s words, “clearly came from the ranks of the executive, while very few initiatives intended to foster exports came from organized interest groups” (p. 121).

21. Hagemann (2001), the “hegemony of protectionist policies” in the 1880s led to the disbandment of the Kongreß der Deutschen Volkswirte (p. 158).

22. Augello and Guidi (2001), p. 70 et seq.

23. Michelini (2000), pp. 405-433.

24. Cited in Michelini (2000), p. 408.

25. Michelini (2000), p. 410.

26. Michelini (2000), p. 417.

who, through public meetings and the press, particularly the *Giornale degli Economisti*, campaigned to mobilize public opinion against the raising of grain tariffs in 1894. But no more activism is recorded until 1899, when the *Giornale* made a last and meagre reference to this Associazione's satisfaction with the conclusion of a treaty with France. Only individual interests, mostly exporters, continued to campaign against protection at the turn of the century and the defense of free trade ideas (with defections as noticeable as Pareto's) finally retrenched into academic circles.<sup>27</sup> Thus, apart from lacking continuity, the activism of both associations was very short-lived.<sup>28</sup> This fact, together with the dwindling of the French and German free trade lobbying associations in the early 1880s, make the agitation of the Spanish ARAA at the end of the nineteenth century an appealing case study.

### **The Asociación. Who and why**

The ARAA was "reconstituted" in April 1879,<sup>29</sup> initiating a second phase that lasted until the early twentieth century. In this section we examine who was behind the Asociación's reconstitution and kept it active in this second phase and we also discuss the objectives of this reconstitution.

The men responsible for the reconstitution of the Asociación had a different profile from those who founded it in 1859. Its constitution was the work of a group of academics belonging to the so-called "economist school", who were later joined by businessmen and politicians. The reconstitution was the work of some prominent members of the *Círculo de la Unión Mercantil de Madrid*, a powerful organization of businessmen, mainly with commercial interests, who requested asked the most relevant academics from the first phase of the Asociación to collaborate in the second.<sup>30</sup>

The *Círculo* never hid its role in the reconstitution of the Asociación.<sup>31</sup> As a reflection, the interim executive board that preceded the reconstitution in-

27. For the rising activism of agrarian and industrial private interests, see Subacchi (1997).

28. The *Lega Antiprotezionista* founded by radical-liberals and reformist-socialists and led by Antonio de Viti de Marco also had a short life. The *Giornale degli Economisti*, in the issue of July 1904, under the title "La politica commerciale e gl'i interessi dei lavoratori", published the program of the *Lega*, signed by De Viti de Marco. See Tedesco (2002). It closed less than a year after its creation in 1904, was reconstituted in 1913, and finally disappeared in 1914.

29. The term "reconstituted" is that used in the first by-law. *Asociación* (1879), p. 75.

30. The *Círculo* and the *Asociación* had historically shared an excellent relationship. The founder and interim president of the *Círculo* in 1859 was Gregorio López Mollinedo, a businessman who was vice-president of the first executive board of the *Asociación* when it was set up in 1859.

31. "Some members [of the *Círculo*] invited the survivors of that distinguished pleiad of economists that in 1859 proclaimed the virtues of free trade to reconstitute the society, the *Asociación* that had been dissolved in 1869". *Círculo de la Unión Mercantil* (1884), pp. 5-6.



cluded three members of the *Círculo* (one of them being the president), a journalist, and only one member of the old *Asociación*, the former general secretary, Gabriel Rodríguez.<sup>32</sup> At the outset, the absence of Figuerola and other renowned members of the *Asociación* from the interim executive board caused some surprise.<sup>33</sup> Some newspapers even spoke of disagreement among the free traders, reminiscent of the dissensions that had led to ARAA's dissolution in 1869.<sup>34</sup> However, with respect to the act of reconstitution, which took place on 16 April 1879 at the *Círculo*, no tension was reported. Figuerola accepted the vice-presidency and the most significant figures of the *Asociación* from the first phase joined the executive committee, initially presided over by Gabriel Rodríguez. The *Círculo* held the majority in the first executive committee, maintaining its good representation thereafter (Appendix 1), although it is true that the former leaders of the *Asociación* soon regained public prominence.

A second difference concerning the reconstituted *Asociación* was the greater homogeneity in the social and political members' profiles. In the first phase of its existence, from 1859 to 1869, political, social and professional pluralism characterized the ARAA. It involved all the liberal political parties, from the most conservative to the most progressive and the first executive board was fairly politically balanced, with a former conservative finance minister, Pastor, being its first president. Socially, the executive board was also noticeably plural, including politicians, professionals (university teachers, lawyers, and journalists) and businessmen (financiers, railway owners, commercial interests), although there were very few industrialists.

Nevertheless, the reconstitution of the *Asociación* in 1879 meant a general reduction in its pluralism and ever more homogeneity among its most important members. Socially, the group of businessmen was made up almost entirely of those with commercial interests, who were also members of the *Círculo*. Politically, at the end of the *Asociación's* life, the majority of its members, including businessmen, were left-wing liberals or republicans. Few conservatives and moderate liberals joined the *Asociación* in this second phase, and the few who joined soon left.

32. Gabriel Rodríguez had a close relationship with the *Círculo*, where he gave conferences regularly and of which he became an honorary member. He was even a candidate for the Congress in 1881 as part of the "candidacy for trade" (*candidatura del comercio*) that the *Círculo* supported. The other members were the president of the *Círculo*, Julián Prats, the executives Bonifacio Ruiz de Velasco and Ildefonso Trompeta, and the journalist Eduardo García Díaz. Prats and Ruiz de Velasco became vice-presidents and Trompeta and García Díaz secretaries in the first executive committee. *El Globo*, 12 April 1879.

33. *El Imparcial*, 12 April 1879. Moret, Echegaray, Sanromá and Bona were the missing names mentioned.

34. *La Época* said that Ruiz de Velasco proposed Figuerola as president of the interim executive board, but the rest of the *Círculo's* members preferred Gabriel Rodríguez, 14 April 1879.

Proof of the homogeneity among its most important members are the examples of Laureano Figuerola and Gabriel Rodríguez, both having occupied the relevant posts of vice-president and general secretary, respectively, in the first phase of the Asociación and both becoming presidents (Figuerola from 1883) in the second phase. They shared many features. They were professors, they declared themselves radical in economy and, politically, they claimed to be progressist democrats before and republicans during the Bourbon monarchy. Figuerola and Gabriel Rodríguez had held important political positions during the Sexenio Revolucionario (1868-1874), the former having been president of the Senate, finance minister, MP and senator, the second vice-minister of finance under Figuerola, MP and senator.<sup>35</sup> It is true that the general secretaries, Gumersindo de Azcárate and Ildefonso Trompeta (from 1886), were apparently different. Azcárate belonged to the academic world and Trompeta was a commercial businessman. However, like the presidents of the Asociación, the two were active republicans (Azcárate was an MP for many years) and always strongly opposed the governmental conservative and liberal parties. To sum up, in the second phase of the Asociación, its four most representative members were outside the core of the political system.

Importantly, this social and political homogeneity extended to the nucleus of the 23 most significant people (Table 1). They included those who occupied the main posts (president, vice-president, and general secretary) along with others who intervened most frequently (on at least five occasions) in the activities organized by the Asociación or in external activities on behalf of the Asociación.<sup>36</sup> This nucleus was made up of 12 professionals and 11 businessmen. The former led the open meetings and were in charge of reporting on commercial issues before official commissions of enquiry. The latter provided the Asociación with funding, and connections with the press and the administrative structure, since all the secretaries, treasurers and accountants came from the *Círculo*.

Ten lawyers and two engineers constituted the group of professionals. Of these 12 members, five worked as lawyers, five were professors, one lived off private wealth, and the other was a journalist. However, politics was the main interest of them all, which is evident in the fact that they were all MPs or senators for varying lengths of time. In fact, seven members of this group were continuously present in the Congress or the Senate during this second phase,

35. After the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1875, Figuerola and Gabriel Rodríguez ran several times for election as congressmen with the Republican party, but were never elected. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, the second ran for election in 1881 with the *candidatura del comercio*, promoted by the *Círculo*, together with the president of the *Círculo* and treasurer of the Asociación, Domingo Peña Villarejo.

36. Executive boards had 55-56 members in this second phase. A list of the members of each executive board can be found in Appendix 1.

**TABLE 1 • Core members of the Asociación (ARAA)**  
 (Presidents, vice-presidents, general secretaries, and members with more interventions in meetings)

Name	Post within the ARAA		Meetings ARAA (no.)		Post within the <i>Círculo</i>		Profession 1879-1903	Political party 1879-1903	Political post	
	Presidency	Interventions	Presidency	Interventions	1879-1903	After 1903			1879-1903	After 1903
<i>Professionals and politicians</i>										
L. Figuerola	VP-P	15	5		P	R				PS, M, MP, S, JA
G. Rodríguez	P-VP	5	15		P-L	R				MP-S
J.M. Santromá	VP	-	1		P	R			JAV	MP-JA
S. Moret	VP	-	10		P-Pol	LL			PC-M-MP	PM-M-MP
M. Pedregal	VP	2	12		L-Pol	R			MP	M-MP
S. Ruiz Gómez	VP	-	2		L-Pol	LL			M-S	M-MP
J. López Puigcerver	VP	-	2		L-Pol	LL			M-MP	MP
Aguilar de Campoo (m.)	VP	-	-		I-B-Pol	L-C			M-MP-S-JAV	
G. Azcárate	GS-VP	-	13		P-Pol	R			MP	
A. Aguilera	V	-	3		L-Pol	LL			M-MP-S	
J. Costa	V	-	4		L	R			MP	
Fco. Calvo y Muñoz	S	-	3		J	L			MP	

(Continued on the next page)

Name	Post within the ARAA	Meetings ARAA (no.)		Post within the <i>Círculo</i>	Profession 1879-1903	Political party 1879-1903	Political post	
		Presidency	Interventions				1879-1903	Before 1879/ After 1903
<i>Businessmen</i>								
F. Bona	VP	1	5		B	D	-	MP-JA
J. Prats	VP	-	-	P	B	D	JAV	
P. de Pereda	VP	-	-	P	B	D	-	MP
M. S. Muniesa	VP	-	-	P	B	R-L	MP	
C. Prast	VP	-	-	P	B-Pol	C	MP	
B. Ruiz de Velasco	VP	-	-	V	B-Pol	C	MP-JAV	JA
I. Trompeta	S-GS	-	-	V	B	R	JAV	
J.M. Alonso de Beraza	V	-	3	V	B-J	R	JAV	MP
A. Aura Boronat	V	-	3		B-J-Pol	R-LL	MP	MP
J. Ruiz de Castañeda	V	-	11	V	B-J	D	-	
M. Zapatero	V	-	8	V	B-J	D	-	

Notes:

Posts within the ARAA and the *Círculo*: P: President; VP: Vice-president; V: Speaker; GS: General Secretary; S: Secretary

Profession: P: Professor; B: Businessman; L: Lawyer; I: Engineer; J: Journalist; Pol: Politician

Political party: R: Republican; D: Democrat; LL: Left-wing liberal; L: Liberal; C: Conservative

Political post: PM: Prime Minister; PC: President of the Congress; PS: President of the Senate; M: Minister; MP: Member of Parliament; S: Senator; JA: Junta de Aranceles; JAV: Junta de Aranceles y Valoraciones

five of whom became ministers and one, Segismundo Moret, even reached the presidency.<sup>37</sup> Their ideology differed little, ranging between progressive liberalism and democratic radicalism, and they were members of the left-wing liberal and republican parties.<sup>38</sup>

The older members of this group of professionals had been part of the Asociación in its first phase, they all belonged to the “economist school”, and they were full supporters of economic liberalism in the extreme version of the French optimistic school. Moreover, several of them were honorary members of the Cobden Club (Figuerola, Rodríguez, Sanromá, and Moret, among others). Their affinity with this club is clear in the words of Gabriel Rodríguez when, at a dinner at the Círculo, he proposed “a toast in honor of the Cobden Club, the society that scares the protectionists so much and whose motto is ours: free trade, peace, and goodwill among the Nations”.<sup>39</sup>

Almost all of the second group of 11 businessmen in the nucleus of the Asociación were members of the Círculo.<sup>40</sup> Four presidents of the Círculo were vice-presidents of the Asociación and other members of the Círculo’s board played an active role in the free trade movement. Most members of the Círculo had commercial businesses, although there were also some real estate and newspaper businessmen.<sup>41</sup> At the time, this organization was very active. It helped to promote the creation of chambers of commerce in 1886 and organized three commerce congresses and the setting up of a Liga Nacional de Contribuyentes (National League of Taxpayers). Politically, its members were also quite active and some of them were MPs. More than once, the Círculo itself presented a list of candidates for election to Congress and obtained one seat in 1896. Ideologically, this group was also dominated by radical liberals

37. Undoubtedly, Moret was the most important political figure in the Asociación. He was a minister 12 times and, as well as president of the Congress, he was prime minister three times (in 1905, 1906, and 1909). Among the five ministers of the Asociación, two (López Puigcerver and Aguilera) belonged to Moret’s inner circle.

38. They also participated in progressive movements, such as abolitionism, and promoted secular teaching. Figuerola was the first dean of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, established in 1876. The Institución had, in members of the Asociación such as Gabriel Rodríguez, Azcárate, Sanromá, Costa, Moret and Pedregal, its main promoters and teachers. Other members of the ARAA were businessmen who, like Aura or Julián Prats, supported the Institución. Prats contributed “with pecuniary funds and substantial loans” to the Institución, according to his necrology. *Boletín de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, no. 7, 1883. On the role of Aura, see Cacho Viu (1962), p. 430.

39. Círculo (1884), p. 20. The Asociación had published a book to honor Cobden in 1865, the year of his death.

40. Only two of them did not belong to the Círculo, a well-known financier, Félix Bona, who had been vice-president of the Asociación in the first phase and became vice-president again in the second, and a Valencian industrialist, Aura, who took up journalism and politics, firstly as a possibilist republican and, later, as a liberal.

41. Juan Ruiz Castañeda and Manuel Zapatero were businessmen in Madrid, but they also had interests in the newspaper business and wrote for different papers assiduously, to the point of being sometimes taken for journalists.

and republicans. It is true that initially it presented a more varied composition than that of the professionals, since there were two conservative MPs, but they abandoned the Asociación in the late 1880s.<sup>42</sup>

Over time, the ideological similarities between the two groups led to a certain loss of influence for the Asociación, despite having several ministers among its members. From the beginning of the second phase, the ARAA had been aware of the risk of losing political influence and made an effort to present itself as neutral. In 1880, Gabriel Rodríguez boasted that the Asociación was made up of people “representing all the Spanish political parties”.<sup>43</sup> Things would soon change. Cánovas del Castillo accepted protectionism as a partisan tenet in the late 1880s and, thereafter, no members of the conservative party would form part of the executive board.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in the early 1890s, the majority of the Liberal party accepted the shift towards protection fostered by the conservatives. Convincing proof of this change in attitudes is the fact that the protectionist bill passed by the conservatives in 1891 was not repealed when the liberals returned to government in 1892, with Sagasta as prime minister.

Moving on to the motive for reconstituting the Asociación, according to the circular sent by the executive board to its ex-members, the reason was the Spanish protectionist attempt to make us “retrace our steps on the path to free trade”.<sup>45</sup>

In 1879, the turning point towards protection for continental Europe, Spain found itself in a transitory situation. The tariff of 1869 was still in force, although with two significant amendments introduced in 1875 by the first government of the restored Bourbon monarchy.<sup>46</sup> The first amendment meant the suspension of the tariff reduction that, according to the so-called fifth base, should have taken place in 1875.<sup>47</sup> The suspension was justified with references to the ongoing Spanish civil war (the Carlist War, 1872-1876). The second amendment consisted of passing a new double column tariff in 1877. There was a first column of duties coinciding with the duties of the 1869 tariff and a second column of slightly lower duties only to be applied to the

42. These two MPs were Carlos Prast and Bonifacio Ruiz de Velasco.

43. *Asociación* (1880a), p.8.

44. Gabriel Rodríguez himself recognized the relevance of this fact by declaring, “Such is the authority of Mr Cánovas, that his solemn speech on 5 February 1888 was enough for some very learned members of the Asociación to leave it, even though these members had belonged to it since its foundation in 1859 and had taken an active and principal part in its activities”. Gabriel Rodríguez (1891), p. 250.

45. *Asociación* (1879), p. 78.

46. See Serrano Sanz (1987).

47. The law that approved the 1869 bill established, in its fifth base, that on 1 July 1875 all the duties between 15% and 20% ad valorem would be reduced to 15%. Duties above 20% were planned to be lowered to 15% through three one-third reductions to be applied in July 1875, 1878, and 1881.

countries that, in exchange, had signed trade treaties with Spain. Through these two amendments, the movement towards free trade that was unilaterally planned in 1869 turned into reciprocity, of which the treaty with France is a good example. On the basis of the 1877 bill, Spain negotiated a treaty with France in that same year. In exchange for reduced duties in the second column, Spain achieved a substantial reduction on wine duties that, coinciding with the advance of the phylloxera plague in France, implied a remarkable increase for Spanish exports.

This was the situation prevailing in 1879 when the ARAA was reestablished. The first issue to address was the defense of the unilateral tariff reduction planned in the fifth base of 1869, still in suspension. There was strong concern about the high barriers to grain imports, which caused serious problems in years of bad harvest, and there were also calls for a free trade agreement between Spain and its colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines).

But the *Asociación* was not only worried about the internal situation. The shift of continental Europe towards protection due to “the doubts and weakness” shown by some countries regarding free trade, led to fears that the situation could be used in Spain to argue in favor of reinforcing trade barriers.<sup>48</sup> In the first meeting of the *Asociación* in 1879, Moret spoke of “a certain resurrection of the spirit of protection”,<sup>49</sup> with origins in Germany, the USA and some British colonies, such as Australia. In his view, the reigniting of protectionism was mainly a reaction to the crisis: since the widespread economic depression had started in a relatively low protectionist framework, protection was argued to be the solution.<sup>50</sup>

### **The *Asociación*. Arguments and campaign**

The ultimate goal of the *Asociación*, according to its by-laws, was to win over public opinion to the idea of reducing tariffs until they became mere fiscal revenues, although its most renowned members declared themselves in favor of the absolute suppression of customs. Fiscal duties had been established at a 15% ad valorem maximum in 1869 but, in a meeting in November 1882, Figuerola declared that, thereafter, the *Asociación* would defend a 10% maximum.<sup>51</sup>

48. *Asociación* (1879), p. 52.

49. *Asociación* (1879), p. 53.

50. *Asociación* (1879), p. 53.

51. This was the demand of Gabriel Rodríguez and the most radical members of the *Asociación* when discussing the 1869 bill. Based on his agreement with Prim, Figuerola always discarded this option.

To achieve this 10% maximum, the Asociación described itself as fully “possibilist”, meaning that while its members were ideally in favor of unilateral liberalization and, consequently, opposed to reciprocity, they all accepted the interchanging of tariff reductions through negotiation. Any tariff reduction, even if it came through “wandering paths”, as Figuerola put it, was welcome. According to Gabriel Rodríguez, “The Asociación, which knows that it cannot be done overnight is taking and accepting, without ever lowering its flag, everything that gets it closer to the goal to which its efforts are addressed. Our formula is, thus, to take everything within our reach and keep on asking for more”.<sup>52</sup>

The activism of the Asociación intensified in 1882, when a new treaty with France started to be negotiated. This treaty, approved in May, basically consisted of offering the first reduction planned in the fifth base of 1869. Importantly, these lower duties would end up constituting the second column of the new bill passed in 1882, which, in turn, was offered to the majority of countries with which Spain signed trade treaties in the 1880s.<sup>53</sup> In this way, reductions through treaties looking for reciprocity became the central element of Spanish commercial policy. The opposition of the Spanish protectionist industrialists to the treaty with France in 1882 and with the UK in 1884 was intense, as was the campaign of the Asociación in favor of opening up, which, by then, as already explained, had already accepted reciprocity as the lesser evil. Therefore, the combination of treaties with Europe, the reduction of duties on imports from the colonies, and a law that sought to compensate industrialists by reducing duties on the imports of raw materials pushed Spain on a path towards commercial liberalization throughout the 1880s.

With the aim of reducing tariff barriers, the ARAA used three channels to create opinion and influence policy makers. First, the Asociación organized public meetings to propagate the free trade message, including recurrent invitations to protectionist figures to participate in debates. In the phase that opened in 1879, the Asociación organized 23 meetings in different theatres of Madrid, in which 47 pro free-trade speakers participated, some of them debating with ten pro-protection speakers.<sup>54</sup> All these meetings took place between 1879 and 1893 and the frequency varied depending on the controversy of current issues.<sup>55</sup> For example, there were four meetings in 1882, while in 1888 and 1889 there were none. The issues addressed were quite specific at the

52. *Asociación* (1885a), p.59.

53. By 1888, Spain had signed treaties with all the countries in continental Europe and with the UK. All these treaties included the Most Favored Nation clause. With countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland, the treaty meant an interchange of reductions on the duties established in the second column.

54. See Appendix 2.

55. After 1893, although the press advertised the Asociación’s intention of calling a new meeting, no more have been found.



beginning (grain tariffs, trade treaties, fifth base), but gradually broadened to cover trade policy as a whole. From the beginning, the members of the reconstituted *Asociación* saw their task as a response to this revival of protectionism, a “battle against the economic reaction”.<sup>56</sup> In fact, several of the *Asociación*’s open meetings followed meetings previously held in defense of protection, such as those opposing the treaty with France in 1882, those against the treaty with the UK in 1885 –when the executive board favored the idea of a permanent session, if necessary – and the meetings of the iron industrialists asking for higher tariffs in 1893.

The second way to create opinion in favor of free trade were publications and the frequent involvement of its members, on behalf of the *Asociación*, in public acts. The contents of the *Asociación*’s meetings were immediately published as leaflets –including the protectionist presentations – in a series called “Recent publications on free trade”. The series also included several books by members of the *Asociación* (by Figuerola and Gabriel Rodríguez, among others) and a few translations of foreign pro-free-trade authors (Fawcett, Mallet, Molinari).<sup>57</sup> Members of the *Asociación* regularly collaborated, on its behalf, in the economic and non-economic press. Furthermore, the *Asociación* was represented in congresses and courses, for example, in conferences of the *Círculo de la Unión Mercantil* during the 1880s, in the *Congreso de Agricultores y Ganaderos* in 1881, the *Congreso Nacional Mercantil* and the *Congreso de Vinicultores* in 1886, and the *Congreso Económico Nacional* in 1888, among others.

Finally, the third channel of influence was the participation of the *Asociación* before government agencies, which could be of two types. Either the *Asociación* led the way and proposed changes in trade policy before parliament or it participated whenever the state asked for advice on the issue. In the first case, seven proposals were presented by the *Asociación* demanding, among other actions, the application of the fifth base and free grain imports. In the second case, the *Asociación* took part in the *Información de la Comisión para el estudio de las industrias lanera y naviera* in 1879 (Report of the Commission to study the wool and shipping industries) and in the two most important official reports of the 1880s, those of the *Comisión para el estudio de la Crisis Agrícola y Pecuaria* (the Commission to study the agricultural and livestock crisis) in 1886, and the *Comisión para el estudio de la Reforma Arancelaria y los Tratados de Comercio* (the Commission to study the tariff reform and trade treaties) in 1889. The *Asociación* also reported on trade related questions at the request of the Congress and the Senate in the 1880s and early 1890s.

56. *Asociación* (1891), p. 44.

57. Fawcett (1879), Mallet (1879) and Molinari (1891).

During this long decade, the ARAA was remarkably active in supporting free trade and, initially, its message had the support of the press and public opinion, which explains the confidence and optimism transmitted by its members. Gabriel Rodríguez, for example, said in 1880, “Public opinion is with us. Most of the press is free trader”.<sup>58</sup> Although as early as 1885, he mentioned the difficulty of organizing any interests that were not protectionist. A year later, Figuerola himself criticized the press for referring to free traders as “exaggerated”.<sup>59</sup> The time had come for the Asociación to directly address consumers as the part of society most harmed by protectionism. Figuerola literally spoke of “summoning consumers”, while Sanromá proposed the organization of a Liga Nacional de Consumidores (National Consumers League).

The reconstituted Asociación acted as a fighter for free trade. There was less room for intellectual debate, unlike during its first phase when the Asociación combined academic discussion with propaganda. In the first ten years of its life, many meetings and courses were held and publications were circulated to explain and propagate the virtues of free trade as a philosophical and political principle.<sup>60</sup> From 1879 onwards, most activities were closely related to some particular event; frequently, to a specific policy decision on tariffs. In this way, the Asociación differentiated itself from the political economic societies that had spread across Europe in the middle of the century and focused more on the defense of the liberal economy than on specific trade policy decisions.<sup>61</sup>

In this second phase, discussions on the principles of liberalism were scant. References to these principles, when made, were presented only in passing by its two presidents, Figuerola and Gabriel Rodríguez. For the former, it was sufficient to say that “free trade is a scientific tenet”<sup>62</sup> and for the latter that “there was no more scientific discussion on the free trade issue”.<sup>63</sup> Figuerola dismissed the infant industry argument, so popular among protectionists, by saying, “I have been hearing of ruin and infant industry for 60 years now. That’s some baby!”<sup>64</sup> Gabriel Rodríguez occasionally recovered the idea, omnipresent in the previous phase of the Asociación, that freedom is indivisible and free trade participates in a system that includes all possible liberties, from political to religious freedoms.<sup>65</sup>

58. *Asociación* (1880b), p. 64.

59. *Asociación* (1886), p. 3.

60. See Serrano Sanz (2017). The philosophical and political principle related free trade to national liberalism, social justice, and international peace.

61. The Spanish Political Economic Society, from which the Asociación itself was born, disappeared in the early 1870s.

62. *Asociación* (1886), p.5.

63. G. Rodríguez (1881), p. 115.

64. *Asociación* (1893), p. 7.

65. *Asociación* (1886), p. 45.

The only general issue that attracted more attention than in the first phase was the defense of cosmopolitanism, with which the *Asociación* aimed to counteract the idea of nationalism so dear to contemporary protectionists. According to protectionists, the defense of the nation's interests, and not the world's, should inspire the policy makers. In Spain, Cánovas del Castillo, in 1882, started supporting the centrality of the nation-state in decisions of economic policy and, subsequently, the virtues of reciprocity in international trade. In the same year, Gabriel Rodríguez responded to Cánovas as follows: "All the arguments of reciprocitists (sic) are based on the error that the economic interest of a nation and that of mankind are conflicting. From this error, they derive that free trade, good in a cosmopolitan sense, might be against a nation's interests".<sup>66</sup> Figuerola also referred to reciprocity in treaties as "unacceptable".<sup>67</sup> Although, as said above, by 1885, they had accepted treaties as a lesser evil.

At a more practical level, the opposers to protectionism based their arguments mostly on two ideas. First, free trade was presented as a guarantee that no vested economic interests would put pressure on the government for tariffs that benefited these interests at the expense of the general public. Regarding this point, Azcárate, as a member of the *Asociación*, optimistically said in 1881, "We merely have small fractions of the wool, shipping and grain industries opposing us, and supporting us, all the Spanish consumers, all the industries not susceptible of being protected and all those prosecuted".<sup>68</sup> In 1882, Joaquín Costa estimated that free trade supporters amounted to "90% of Spaniards, who are rural laborers or who work in non-protected industries".<sup>69</sup>

These perceptions changed radically with the threat of a protectionist backlash following the agricultural crisis in the late 1880s. In the middle of this decade, free traders had already formulated the advantages of small and unified interest groups to organize collective action. The basis for the political economy of protection was perfectly clear to the *Asociación* in 1885, when Azcárate asserted, "The more limited the number of recipients, the more strongly privileges are defended [...] It is very difficult, in a country like Spain, with a poor tradition of social action, to connect a myriad of winemakers scattered over the country (who were interested in treaties), while it is quite easy for the privileged few who live in the same province (for example, textile industrialists concentrated in Barcelona) to reach an understanding".<sup>70</sup>

The other big argument put forward regularly against protection was the impossibility of protecting every type of economic production at the same

66. *Asociación* (1882b), p. 57.

67. *Asociación* (1882a), p. 30.

68. *Asociación* (1881a), p. 57.

69. *Asociación* (1881b), p. 41.

70. *Asociación* (1885b), p. 38.

time. Since the debate that preceded the Spanish bill of 1820, the first approved in parliament, one constant demand of the industrial lobbies had been protection for all. While this strategy was present throughout the century under different names (interchanging protection, universal protection, protectionist solidarity, and integral protection), it gained greater momentum with the consolidation of the national economy concept. This explains why free traders insisted on the impossibility of protecting everyone at the same time. “If everybody is protected there cannot be protectors, if everybody is a protector nobody can be protected.”<sup>71</sup> The argument was grounded on the infeasibility of protecting non-tradables (commerce and services in general) and exports, while these activities, nonetheless, were harmed by the increase of domestic prices resulting from customs tariffs.

According to the *Asociación*, the strategy of integral protection was intrinsically contradictory. Protecting agriculture meant higher domestic prices for foodstuffs and raw materials and, therefore, higher costs for industry. If, to compensate for these increasing costs of production, duties on textiles and machinery were raised, then agricultural activities would have to face rising costs of living and production, and so on. The bitter discussions on the strict meaning of “raw materials” that surrounded the decision of reducing their duties in 1883 was a good illustration of the ambiguity and subsequent dangers of protection. In the opinion of the *Asociación*, any item was an input in the production of another item, increasing the costs and thus reducing the competitiveness of Spanish exportable products that were of crucial relevance to finance, for example, the Spanish imports of cotton and coal.<sup>72</sup>

Apart from these two main arguments against protection, the *Asociación* insisted on denouncing one problem that was idiosyncratic to Spain. It repeatedly accused the *Junta de Aranceles y Valoraciones* (Board of Tariffs and Valuations) of exaggerating the import unit values on which the *ad valorem* duties were applied. The *Asociación* blamed vested industrial interests within the *Junta* for exaggeration, which led to higher protection than that officially agreed.

## The end

In the late 1880s, the grain invasion triggered by the drop in long-haul transport costs that had affected Europe since the 1870s started to affect Spain, thus adding Castilian agriculture demands for protection to those historically called for by the Catalan textile industries. In December 1890, the agricultural crisis led to a rise in duties on wheat and cattle and the repeal of

71. *Asociación* (1888), p. 30.

72. *Asociación* (1883).

the fifth base, considered by then a relic of unilateralism. A year later, in December 1891, as part of a strategy to force France to negotiate a new treaty, duties on manufactured goods were also increased. The French protectionist Méline tariff spectacularly raised the tariffs on wine, which would mean paying nearly 15 francs per hectoliter, instead of the 2 francs in force since 1882, unless Spain signed a new treaty. The importance of this market for Spain (wine exports amounted to one third of total exports in 1891, 80% of which went to France) explains the spectacular rise of the second column of duties in the Spanish bill of 1891. The problem was that, as Spain failed to entice France into the negotiation of tariff reductions, this bill left the level of Spanish barriers substantially higher.<sup>73</sup>

The crisis strengthened protectionist interests, against which the ARAA continued fighting, even after the approval of the 1891 bill. In the early 1890s, however, its members perceived that its forces had substantially weakened. The atmosphere was utterly different from that prevailing ten years before, when the Instituto de Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, the oldest protectionist lobby in Spain, closely linked to the Catalan cotton industry, presented the launching of its journal, *El Eco de la Producción Nacional* in 1880 as a direct response to the successful propaganda campaign of the Asociación. The first issues of *El Eco* insisted that “meetings, leaflets and press are the free trader’s weapons” used in their “conquest of public opinion”.<sup>74</sup> Against this activism, *El Eco* argued the need to “oppose speech by speech, journal by journal” since “word plus pen are the tools to gain opinion and public opinion is the place to stand which Archimedes asked for to move the Earth”.<sup>75</sup> A thorough reading of this journal (1880-1888) shows the sustained importance that the Instituto assigned to propaganda in order to move Spain towards protectionism. Most importantly, by reporting on the protectionist campaign deployed with respect to the tariff reform of 1882, *El Eco* resonated the “frantic upheaval”<sup>76</sup> of the free traders. The Asociación’s use of the press “to provoke” and “create” a supportive free trade public opinion was succeeding.<sup>77</sup> In fact, no complaint about the activism of the Asociación in the tariff reform of 1882-1886 appeared without a counter-complaint about the role of the Madrid dailies in it. *El Liberal* and *El Imparcial*, whose “articles, leaflets and supplements are all addressed to show the country the benefits of free trade”, attracted special animosity.<sup>78</sup> The reduction in tariff barriers resulting from the 1882 bill and ensuing trade treaties did nothing but confirm that public opin-

73. See Serrano Sanz (1987).

74. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 1 (1 April 1880) and no. 14 (16 August 1880).

75. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 5 (1 June 1880).

76. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 24 (16 March 1881).

77. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 7 (1 July 1880) and no. 53 (16 October 1882).

78. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 84 (31 March 1884).

ion continued on the side of the Asociación, which, led by a dozen honorary members of the Cobden Club, awarded Spain (United Kingdom excluded), “the sad privilege of having theoretical and practical free traders while, in the rest of world, only theorists were left”.<sup>79</sup> In the early 1880s, Spanish free trade activism was perceived as unique even by national protectionists.

This singularity became more accentuated as the decade progressed and, in 1887, coinciding with a surge in emigration towards America and Africa, the government constituted a parliamentary commission to report on the ongoing agricultural crisis. From the very beginning, this commission was regarded as a prelude to the increase of tariffs on grain imports. Accordingly, the activism of the Asociación intensified, redoubling efforts when, four months after the conclusion of the report on the agricultural crisis in June 1889, the government constituted a new commission to report on the convenience of a general revision of the 1882 bill and its related treaties. By then, however, the atmosphere in which the Asociación’s propaganda was to be displayed differed noticeably from that prevailing at the beginning of the decade. *El Economista Español*, the monthly newspaper that replaced *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, continued to inform on the free trade campaign, although now condescendingly. In December 1891, the journal stated that, “currently, free traders preach in the desert”, and underlined how “a daily with such a wide circulation as *El Imparcial*, a determined free trader not long ago [...] warned against the abstractions of free trade propagandists”.<sup>80</sup> Half a year later, the Asociación itself had publicly accepted the change of public opinion about free trade. Its general secretary, Ildefonso Trompeta, from the pages of the daily *El Liberal*, regretted that the Asociación’s enduring campaign “had taught people nothing”.<sup>81</sup> Alonso de Beraza, also a member of the Asociación and owner of *El Liberal*, recognized “the impossibility of governing against the force of the circumstances” that moved Spain towards protectionism.<sup>82</sup>

79. *El Eco de la Producción Nacional*, no. 4 (16 March 1880).

80. *El Economista Español*, 15 December 1891. It refers to *El Imparcial*, 8 December 1891. This daily stopped heralding the virtues of free trade in 1891 and became very critical of the efforts of members of the Asociación in Parliament, significantly Moret’s, to get a treaty with Germany ratified in 1894, which entailed the reduction of tariffs on Spanish manufactured goods. “From bad to worse” was the title that *El Imparcial* gave its editorial on 12 April 1894, to refer to the attempt by the impending liberal government to accelerate the approval of the Spanish-German treaty by the Senate. It is also telling that, when this journal designed a new section in 1894 aimed at enlightening public opinion on current issues, the one selected was trade policy and the invited expert was Cánovas, the conservative leader and, most importantly, the father of the protectionist bill of 1891. *El Imparcial*, 8 June 1894. In the introduction to Canova’s article, the editorial welcomed his defense of domestic labor in contrast to “certain free trade ideas, certainly capable of warming up many brains, but equally capable of shutting down all the furnaces in the factories”.

81. *El Liberal*, 7 June 1892.

82. *El Liberal*, 24 November 1892.

In February 1893, the general secretary recognized in his report to the executive board that neither the press nor general opinion supported free trade anymore, so much so that he considered the advisability of dissolving the Asociación.<sup>83</sup> At the end of this year, the journal *El Imparcial*, traditionally close to the Asociación's ideas, referred to its last meeting in 1893 as more remarkable "for the quality than for the number of the attendants".<sup>84</sup> One month later, the press reported that the Asociación's executive board could not be renewed "due to the shortage of members".<sup>85</sup>

As had previously occurred in France and Germany, the advance of protectionist interests led Spanish academics to abandon campaigning. The fight in favor of free trade moved from the world of ideas to the world of vested interests embodied in the *Círculo*. In December 1893, while the Asociación's meeting was poorly attended, the press underlined the "extraordinary attendance" at the meeting that the *Círculo* held the same month, where a proposal signed by more than 500 members requested the repeal of the 1891 bill.<sup>86</sup>

News related to ARAA's activity in the national press dwindled in the second half of the 1890s, for which we have found no references to meetings or publications. Most significantly, news concerning the Asociación started to be written in the past tense after 1900, and in 1902, Rafael María de Labra, a member of the executive board since 1879, assumed it to have dissolved when he referred to the once "famous Asociación for the Tariff Reform, whose absence is so regrettable in the present time of unstoppable protectionism".<sup>87</sup> The last mentions of the Asociación in the press were in relation to the attendance of its old members: first, to the burial of Figuerola, and, second, to a meeting of the *Círculo* in 1903.<sup>88</sup>

83. *La Época*, 20 February 1893.

84. *El Imparcial*, 27 December 1893.

85. *El Día*, 30 January 1894. There were elections to renew the executive committee in 1896 and 1897, resulting in the reelection of the same members. In 1897, the Asociación drew attention to the "prosperity" of its finances, due, probably, to the absence of activities. Reflecting the biological decline of the Asociación, a generous amount of money (500 pesetas) was assigned to build a monument honoring a historical member who had recently passed away (Manuel Pedregal). *El Globo*, 6 February 1897. There would be no more reports of meetings in the press after this. More proof that the times when public opinion resonated with the free traders' propaganda had been left behind can be seen in the words with which Moret addressed the audience at a conference in the *Círculo de la Unión Mercantil* in January 1895: "To be a free trader used to be in fashion; it used to be well seen to attend the meetings (of the Asociación) at the Madrid stock exchange". *El Liberal*, 17 January 1895.

86. *El Día*, 15 December 1893. Within days, the prime minister received a committee from the *Círculo* reporting on this demand.

87. Rafael María del Labra, *Nuestro Tiempo*, 1902, p. 473.

88. According to *La Vanguardia*, in the funeral procession that bid farewell to Figuerola, the "comisión (sic) para la reforma de los aranceles de aduanas" was represented (3 March 1903). The *Heraldo de Madrid* said that in Gerona "the lavish and artistic funeral wreath that the Asociación para la Reforma de los Aranceles de Aduanas dedicated to the big financial policy-maker Laureano Figuerola grabbed powerfully the attention" (5 March 1903). Some

As mentioned above, the disappearance of the Asociación left the defense of free trade in the hands of, basically, commercial interests. Thus, in 1904, when the government sought external advice to revise the 1891 tariff, it was Constantino Rodríguez, one-time member of the Asociación and later the incumbent president of the *Círculo*, who was appointed as a supporter of free trade, while no member of the Asociación was convened. Even more tellingly was when, in 1905, the *Círculo* sent a letter complaining about the protectionist bias of the proposal for a new bill. It identified itself as “the only upholder, as institution, of free trade ideas”. The result was the approval of a bill in 1906 that reasserted, with no hope of future reductions through reciprocity, the level of protection granted to Spanish industry by the previous bill. Paradoxically, the president of the cabinet that passed the 1906 bill, Moret, had been one of the most fervent and active members of the Asociación.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusions

The ARAA was unique in late-nineteenth-century Europe as none of the other free-trade organizations, with the exception of the Cobden Club, had maintained such long-lasting campaigns. Its “reconstitution” in 1879 arose from concerns by the *Círculo de la Unión Mercantil* regarding the continental protectionist backlash. A majority of the *Círculo*’s members were important merchants who feared an increase in customs tariffs and were confident that the academics within the Asociación could help in the struggle against protection. Therefore, men of ideas shared a free trade propaganda campaign with a group of vested interests. The campaign was carried out through open lectures and reporting before official commissions of enquiry in the 1880s and early 1890s, and was profusely chronicled by the contemporary press. Importantly, our research on the composition, procedures, and arguments of the ARAA found no significant differences with those of the Association pour la Defense de la Liberté Commerciale, the German Economic Kongreß, or even the Cobden Club. Consequently, the delay by the Asociación to follow in the footsteps of the French and German organizations in their gradual disappearance cannot be explained by its idiosyncrasy.

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months later, *El Imparcial* reported that the *Círculo* had invited several members of the Asociación to participate in a meeting. But the newspaper was simply mentioning the Asociación as a short-cut to characterizing them as free traders. These former members were Segismundo Moret, the Duke of Almodóvar del Río, Gumersindo de Azcárate and, indeed, Rafael Maria de Labra. *El Imparcial*, 31 October, 1903. This is the last mention of the Asociación in contemporary press.

89. See Sabaté (1996).



The Asociación started to weaken in the mid-1890s, when mentions of its activism were less and less frequent in the press, becoming almost non-existent at the beginning of the twentieth century. We can argue that this delay corresponds, in turn, to the delayed confrontation of its members to the acceptance that, in troubled times, distributional goals are prioritized over efficiency. The Spanish crisis triggered by the arrival of overseas and Russian grain at the end of the 1880s, worsened due to France's refusal to maintain low import tariffs on Spanish wine in the early 1890s, diverted public opinion and policy-makers away from free trade in the realm of ideas. The gains of trade specialization (efficiency) blurred when confronted with non-desired agrarian emigration (the losers in the distributional game of globalization).

In the realm of interests, the demands for protection from the competing import sectors – Catalan textiles and, from the late 1880s, the Castilian agrarians and Basque iron industrialists – were echoed in public opinion. Free trade is based on the defense of consumers but, as Blinder (2017) argues, during crises, consumption is less of a concern than the preservation of jobs. Unlike the situation in the UK, industrial workers actively supported protectionism. With no pressure from these workers in favor of cheap grain and the general perception that the golden era of wine exports to France had ended, the Asociación failed to mobilize opinion under the consumer rights flag. This loss of support, in turn, led the ARAA to stop fighting publicly in favor of free trade. With the shine of the benefits to be derived from the treaty signed with France in 1882 having vanished, Spanish academics discontinued their campaign as their French and German counterparts had done a decade beforehand.

In our view, ARAA's delayed response constitutes further evidence of a trade-off between openness and distribution that, in late-nineteenth-century continental Europe, was resolved by reimposing protection. The resolution of this trade-off had the collateral effects of confining academic free traders to the world of ideas, and leaving pure economic interests – those of the *Círculo* in Spain – as the only defenders of globalization in the political arena.

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## **Appendix 1. Executive boards of the Asociación for the Reform of Customs Tariffs**

**1879**

*President:* Gabriel Rodríguez

*Vice-presidents:* Laureano Figuerola, Julián Prats, Segismundo Moret, Bonifacio Ruiz de Velasco, Joaquín María Sanromá, Félix Bona, Patricio de Pereda

*General Secretary:* Gumersindo de Azcárate

*Accountant:* Pedro Ruiz de Velasco

*Treasurer:* Domingo Peña Villarejo

*Speakers:* Adolfo Aguirre, José Luis Albareda, Ignacio de Arce y Mazón, Ángel Barroeta, José María Alonso de Beraza, Andrés Borrego, Mariano Carreras y González, José Carvajal, Eduardo Chao, Rafael Colás, José Echegaray, Juan Antonio García Labiano, Francisco de la Haza, Prudencio de Igartúa, Rafael María de Labra, Manuel María Llorente, Saturio López, Joaquín López Puigcerver, Joaquín Maldonado Macanaz, Gabriel Martínez, Cipriano Segundo Montesino, Justo Pelayo Cuesta, Mario Pérez, Carlos Prats, Rafael Prieto y Caules, Manuel Prieto y Prieto, Pedro Rodríguez, Francisco Ruano, Jacobo Rubio, Servando Ruiz Gómez, Emilio Sancho, Luis Silvela, Francisco Somalo, Pascual Torras, Andrés Urdampilleta

*Secretaries:* Eduardo García Díaz, Miguel Moya, Idelfonso Trompeta, Eduardo de la Riva, Francisco Calvo y Muñoz, Manuel Zapatero García, Ricardo Guillerna, Juan Alvarado

**1881**

*President:* Gabriel Rodríguez

*Vice-presidents:* Laureano Figuerola, Julián Prats, Segismundo Moret, Bonifacio Ruiz de Velasco, Joaquín María Sanromá, Patricio de Pereda, Manuel Pedregal, Félix Bona

*General Secretary:* Gumersindo de Azcárate

*Accountant:* Pedro Ruiz de Velasco

*Treasurer:* Domingo Peña Villarejo

*Speakers:* Alberto Aguilera, Luis Felipe Aguilera, Adolfo Aguirre, José Luis Albareda, José María Alonso de Beraza, Ignacio Arce y Mazón, Ángel Barroeta, Antonio Aura Boronat, Andrés Borrego, Francisco Calvo y Muñoz, Mariano Carreras y González, José Carvajal, Eduardo Chao, Rafael Colás, José Echegaray, Prudencio de Igartúa, Eduardo de la Riva, Rafael María de Labra, Manuel María Llorente, Joaquín López Puigcerver, Cecilio Lora,

Manuel Merelo, Cipriano Segundo Montesino, Justo Pelayo Cuesta, Mario Pérez, Carlos Prast, Manuel Prieto y Prieto, Pedro Rodríguez, Jacobo Rubio, Juan Ruiz Castañeda, Gregorio Ruiz Gómez, Emilio Sancho, Enrique Serrano Fatigati, Luis Silvela, Francisco Somalo, Luis María Utor

*Secretaries:* Ildefonso Trompeta, Miguel Moya, Manuel Zapatero y García, Juan Alvarado, Gutiérrez Brito, García Alonso, Gómez Ortiz, Joaquín García Gámiz-Soldado

## 1883

*President:* Laureano Figuerola

*Vice-presidents:* Gabriel Rodríguez, Joaquín María Sanromá, Patricio de Pereda, Manuel Pedregal, Félix Bona, Segismundo Moret, Bonifacio Ruiz de Velasco, Julián Prats

*General Secretary:* Gumersindo de Azcárate

*Accountant:* Gregorio Ruiz Gómez

*Treasurer:* Domingo Peña Villarejo

*Speakers:* marqués de Aguilar de Campoo, Alberto Aguilera, Luis Felipe Aguilera, José María Alonso de Beraza, Ignacio de Arce y Mazon, Antonio Aura Boronat, Ángel Barroeta, Andrés Borrego, Mariano Carreras y González, Eduardo Chao, Joaquín Costa, José Echegaray, José Ferreras, Juan Antonio García Labiano, Rafael de Gracia y Parejo, Prudencio de Igartúa, Joaquín López Puigcerver, Cecilio Lora, Rafael María de Labra, Manuel María Llorente, el marqués de Riscal, Manuel Merelo, Juan Morales y Serrano, Mario Pérez, Carlos Prast, Joaquín Reche, Nicolás Rico, Pedro Rodríguez, Jacobo Rubio, Juan Ruíz de Castañeda, Enrique Serrano Fatigati, Luis Silvela, Servando Ruiz Gómez, Cipriano Segundo Montesino, Francisco Somalo, Luis María Utor,

*Secretaries:* Ildefonso Trompeta, Manuel Zapatero y García, Juan Alvarado, Miguel Moya, Joaquín García Gámiz-Soldado, Enrique de la Riva, Liborio C. Porset, Lorenzo Benito.

## 1886

*President:* Laureano Figuerola

*Vice-presidents:* Gabriel Rodríguez, Servando Ruiz Gómez, Segismundo Moret, Joaquín María Sanromá, Gumersindo de Azcárate, Manuel Pedregal, Carlos Prast, Félix Bona

*General Secretary:* Ildefonso Trompeta

*Accountant:* Gregorio Ruiz Gómez

*Treasurer:* Domingo de la Peña Villarejo

*Speakers:* Marqués de Aguilar de Campoo, Alberto Aguilera, Luis Felipe Aguilera, José M.<sup>a</sup> Alonso de Beraza, Juan Alvarado, Rafael de Angulo, Ignacio Arce Mazón, Antonio Aura Boronat, Ángel Barroeta, Andrés Borrego, Eduardo Chao, Joaquín Costa, José Echegaray, José Ferreras, Juan Antonio García Labiano, Rafael de Gracia y Parejo, Prudencio de Igartúa, Rafael María de Labra, Joaquín López Puigcerver, Cecilio Lora, Manuel Merelo, Gustavo Morales Díaz, Vicente Morales Díaz, Juan Morales y Serrano, Joaquín Reche, Nicolás Rico, marqués de Riscal, Jacobo Rubio, Juan Ruiz Castañeda, Enrique Serrano Fatigati, Luis Silvela, Pascual Torres, Luis María Utor, Rafael de Vega Arias, Duque de la Victoria, Manuel Zapatero

*Secretaries:* Miguel Moya, Lorenzo Benito, Liborio C. Porset, Joaquín García Gámiz-Soldado, Constantino Rodríguez, José María Cañizares, Francisco Calvo y Muñoz, Enrique de Pereda

## 1890

*Presidente:* Laureano Figuerola

*Vice-presidents:* Segismundo Moret, Manuel Pedregal, Gumersindo de Azcárate, Gabriel Rodríguez, Mariano Sabas Muniesa, Joaquín López Puigcerver, Joaquín María Sanromá, Marqués de Aguilar de Campoo

*General Secretary:* Ildefonso Trompeta

*Accountant:* Gregorio Ruiz Gómez

*Treasurer:* Policarpo Pastor Ojero

*Speakers:* Alberto Aguilera, Luis Felipe Aguilera, Adolfo Aguirre, José M.<sup>a</sup> Alonso de Beraza, Juan Alvarado, Rafael de Angulo, Ignacio Arce Mazón, Aquilino Arias, Antonio Aura Boronat, Ricardo Becerro de Bengoa, Andrés Borrego, Angel Canosa, José Echegaray, Pablo Fernández de Barrios, José Ferreras, Agustín Galíndez, Juan Antonio García Labiano, Juan Gómez Heras, Ricardo Guillerna, Agustín Heredia, Prudencio de Igartúa, Rafael M.<sup>a</sup> de Labra, Manuel Merelo, Gustavo Morales Díaz, Juan Morales y Serrano, Domingo Peña Villarejo, Joaquín Reche, Nicolás Rico, Jacobo Rubio, Juan Ruiz de Castañeda, Pascual Torras, Rafael de Vega, el duque de la Victoria, Eduardo Vincenti, Luis María Utor, Manuel Zapatero

*Secretaries:* Miguel Moya, Joaquín García Gámiz-Soldado, Antonio Gabriel Rodríguez, Constantino Rodríguez, Enrique de Pereda, Lorenzo Benito, Liborio C. Porset, Ramón Pérez Requeijo

## **Appendix 2. Meetings of the asociación para la reforma de los aranceles de aduanas\***

### **1879-1893**

- 1879 Sobre la importación de cereales (8-VI) y Urgencia de autorizar la libre introducción de cereales (26-X)
- 1880 Las reformas arancelarias en las Antillas (22-II), Segundo meeting sobre las reformas arancelarias en las Antillas (14-III) y Sobre la producción vinícola y el comercio internacional (14-XI)
- 1881 La reforma general de aranceles y las cuestiones vinícola, lanera y del derecho diferencial de bandera en las Antillas (13-III) y Sobre la urgencia de la reforma arancelaria (26-VI)
- 1882 *Sin título* (8-I), La Base 5.<sup>a</sup> de la ley arancelaria y el Tratado de comercio (25-III), Urgencia del levantamiento de la suspensión de la Base 5.<sup>a</sup> de la ley arancelaria: necesidad de decretar la libre importación de cereales (21-V) y *Sin título* (26-XI)
- 1883 Sobre las llamadas Primeras materias (11-III), Estado actual de la cuestión arancelaria (24-VI) y Estado actual de la cuestión arancelaria y Tratados de comercio (10-XII)
- 1885 Cuestiones arancelarias pendientes (1-III), El Tratado de comercio con Inglaterra (8-III) y Ruptura de las negociaciones con Inglaterra y sus consecuencias para el comercio español (7-VI)
- 1886 Prórroga de los Tratados de comercio y Convenio con Inglaterra (13-VI)
- 1887 Cuestiones arancelarias pendientes (1-V)
- 1888 La crisis económica y el movimiento proteccionista (25-XI)
- 1891 Sobre política arancelaria del Gobierno (11-I)
- 1892 Las nuevas tarifas arancelarias (24-I)
- 1893 El presente conflicto arancelario (25-XII)

\* On the Meetings published in March 1881, January and May 1882, and June 1883, the Asociación is mentioned as Asociación para la Reforma Liberal de los Aranceles de Aduanas (Association for the Liberal Reform of Customs Tariffs).





***Between ideas and interests. The end of the Spanish free trade movement, 1879-c. 1903***

ABSTRACT

This paper researches the unexplored life of the Asociación para la Reforma de los Aranceles de Aduanas (Association for the Reform of Customs Tariffs) after its “reconstitution” in 1879. The result is a picture of a group of academics, politicians and businessmen actively involved in the spreading of free trade ideas during the 1880s and early 1890s, coinciding with the disappearance of this type of organization in continental Europe. Neither differences in its composition or procedures can be found to explain the longer duration of the Asociación’s activism over time. This longer persistence can be put down to the delay with which the Asociación faced the discontent arising from the distributional effects of globalization, not reflected in peaks of agrarian emigration in Spain until the late 1880s. When the failure to sign a treaty with France in 1892 jeopardized the gains from wine exports, the loss of support from public opinion was deemed irreversible and the Asociación, just as its European counterparts had done ten years earlier, stopped campaigning publicly to defend free trade.

KEYWORDS: free trade, tariffs, 19th century, Spain, pressure groups

JEL CODES: B120, F130, N430, N730



***Entre ideas e intereses. El final del movimiento de libre comercio español, 1879-c. 1903***

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga la desconocida historia de la Asociación para la Reforma de los Aranceles de Aduanas (ARAA) tras su “reconstitución” en 1879. El resultado es la imagen de un grupo de académicos, políticos y hombres de negocios activamente implicados en la difusión de las ideas librecambistas en la década de los ochenta y primeros noventa, coincidiendo en el tiempo con la desaparición de este tipo de organización en el continente. Ni las diferencias en composición ni procedimiento pueden explicar la mayor duración del activismo de la Asociación.

Su mayor resistencia ha de relacionarse con el retraso con que sus miembros se enfrentaron a los efectos redistributivos de la globalización, no reflejados en picos de emigración hasta finales de los ochenta. Cuando la imposibilidad de llegar a un acuerdo con Francia en 1892 puso en riesgo los beneficios asociados a la exportación vinícola, la pérdida de apoyo de la opinión pública se juzgó irreversible y la Asociación, igual que sus homólogas europeas hicieran antes, dejó de hacer campaña en favor del librecambio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: librecambio, aranceles, España, siglo XIX, grupos de presión

CÓDIGOS JEL: B120, F130, N430, N730