

La réforme agraire en Amérique latine: ombres et lumières

L'auteur soutient qu'avec la diffusion ces dernières années de politiques néolibérales en Amérique latine, l'ère des grandes réformes agraires, qui a commencé avec la révolution mexicaine au début de ce siècle, touche à sa fin sur le continent. Il est donc opportun de tenter de faire le point sur les causes et les conséquences des réformes agraires mises en œuvre dans la plupart des pays de la région. Ces réformes sont évaluées en fonction de leur impact sur la production agricole, la répartition des revenus, l'emploi, la pauvreté, les rapports entre les sexes, ainsi que du point de vue social et politique. Les gouvernements ont souvent sous-estimé la difficulté qu'il y a à transformer la structure du régime foncier et se sont fait une fausse idée des multiples processus dynamiques que déclenchent la réforme agraire et qui, dans bien des cas, ont eu des conséquences inattendues et involontaires. Les réformes agraires ont souvent provoqué des contre-réformes et néo-réformes dramatiques suscitées par les luttes politiques et sociales qu'elles ont déchaînées. C'est ainsi que les résultats de la réforme agraire en Amérique latine ont été variés et ont donné lieu à un système agraire plus complexe et plus flou. Même si, initialement, certaines réformes agraires avaient pour objectif le bien du paysannat, elles ont, dans la plupart des cas, favorisé l'instauration d'une agriculture capitaliste. La tendance récente à se tourner vers des politiques économiques néolibérales et foncières a ultérieurement encouragé l'agriculture capitaliste tout en accroissant la marginalisation de l'agriculture paysanne.

La reforma agraria en América Latina: luces y sombras

Con la propagación de las políticas neoliberales en toda América Latina durante los últimos años, se aduce que la época de las reformas agrarias importantes, que comenzó con la revolución mexicana al comienzo del siglo, ha llegado a su fin en el continente. Es oportuno, pues, tratar de presentar un panorama general de las causas y las consecuencias de las reformas agrarias que se llevaron a cabo en la mayoría de los países de la región. Las reformas agrarias se evalúan en función de sus repercusiones en la producción agropecuaria, la distribución de los ingresos, el empleo, la pobreza y las relaciones entre el hombre y la mujer, así como desde la perspectiva social y política. Los gobiernos han infravalorado a menudo la complejidad de la transformación de la estructura de la tenencia de la tierra y valorado erróneamente los múltiples procesos dinámicos puestos en marcha por la reforma agraria, con frecuencia con consecuencias involuntarias inesperadas. Las reformas agrarias han provocado muchas veces contrarreformas y neorreformas radicales tras las luchas sociales y políticas desencadenadas por ellas. Por consiguiente, los resultados de la reforma agraria en América Latina han sido desiguales y han dado lugar a un sistema agrario más complejo y fluido. Si bien en principio algunas reformas agrarias tenían por objeto beneficiar a los campesinos, el resultado predominante ha favorecido el crecimiento de la agricultura capitalista. El reciente desplazamiento hacia políticas económicas y agrarias neoliberales ha dado un impulso adicional a la agricultura capitalista, marginando aún más la de los campesinos.

Latin America's agrarian reform: lights and shadows

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It is argued that with the spread of neoliberal policies throughout Latin America in recent years, the era of major agrarian reforms that started with the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century has come to a close on the continent. It is thus opportune to attempt a general overview of the causes and consequences of the agrarian reforms which were implemented in most countries of the region. The reforms are evaluated in terms of their impact on agricultural production, income distribution, employment, poverty and gender relations as well as from a social and political perspective. Governments have often underestimated the complexities of transforming the land tenure structure and misjudged the multifarious dynamic processes set in motion by the agrarian reforms, which frequently had unexpected and unintended consequences. Agrarian reforms often provoked dramatic counterreforms and neo-reforms following the social and political struggles they unleashed. Thus the outcome of Latin America's agrarian reforms has been varied and has given rise to a more complex and fluid agrarian system. While initially some agrarian reforms were intended for the benefit of the peasantry, the predominant outcome has favoured the development of capitalist farming. The recent shift to neoliberal economic policies as well as land policies has given an additional impetus to capitalist farming while further marginalizing peasant farming.

Starting with the Mexican revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, agrarian reforms were implemented throughout most of Latin America, especially from the 1950s to the 1980s. With the spread of neoliberal policies across the region in the past decade, the era of agrarian reforms seems to have come to a close (Herrera, Riddell and Toselli, 1997). Thus this is an appropriate moment to evaluate the agrarian reforms in terms of their impact on agricultural production, income distribution, employment, poverty and gender relations as well as from a social and political perspective, and also to explore the prospects of the neoliberal land policies.

Governments have often underestimated the complexities of transforming the land tenure structure. They have also misjudged

the intricate dynamic processes set in motion by the agrarian reforms, which frequently had unexpected and unintended consequences. Agrarian reforms often provoked dramatic counterreforms and neo-reforms following the social and political struggles they unleashed. Thus the outcome of Latin America's agrarian reforms has been varied and has given rise to a more complex and fluid agrarian system. While initially some agrarian reforms were intended for the benefit of the peasantry, the predominant outcome has favoured the development of capitalist farming (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 1989). The recent shift to neoliberal economic policies has given an additional impetus to capitalist farming while further marginalizing peasant farming.

The apparent end of the era of agrarian reforms does not necessarily mean that the land question has been resolved in Latin

¹Useful comments by Andy Thorpe are acknowledged.

America, but that it no longer commands the political support that it did during the 1960s and 1970s, when cold war concerns arising from the Cuban revolution and an emergent peasant movement put agrarian reform firmly on the political agenda (de Janvry, 1994). Neoliberal land policies have shifted priorities away from expropriation of estates, which typified the populist agrarian reform period, towards privatization, decollectivization, land registration, titling and land tax issues.

The most significant symbol of the neoliberal winds sweeping through Latin America has been the change in 1992 of Article 27 of Mexico's Constitution of 1917, which had opened the road to Latin America's first agrarian reform and which enshrined a principal demand for "land and liberty" by the peasant insurgents during the Mexican revolution. Before 1992 no government had dared to modify this key principle of Mexico's Constitution, but the forces of globalization and neoliberalism proved too strong to resist and the government took the risk of tackling this hitherto sacred cow (Randall, 1996). The new agrarian law marks the end of Mexico's agrarian reforms. It allows the sale of land of the reform sector and the establishment of joint ventures with private investors including foreign capitalists, thereby indicating Mexico's commitment to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (DeWalt, Rees and Murphy, 1994; de Janvry, Gordillo and Sadoulet, 1997).

The Latin American agrarian reform experience also has lessons for countries that have recently embarked on, or intend to introduce, a programme of land expropriation and redistribution (such as South Africa) as well as for those admittedly few countries planning to intensify and extend the expropriation process (such as Zimbabwe) or those where NGOs and other actors are seeking ways to revive the agrarian reform issue, as in the Philippines (Borras, 1997). As the pursuit of neoliberal policies by most Latin American countries has resulted in the privatization of the collective agrarian reform sector, the Latin American case also has lessons for the former communist countries

in transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy, particularly those countries that are decollectivizing their agricultural sector (Spoor, 1997), as well as for countries committed to privatization of communal areas as in some African countries and elsewhere (Nsabagasani, 1997).

The paper begins by discussing Latin America's dismal agricultural economic performance from the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the agrarian reform period in the 1960s. The causes of this poor performance have been the subject of lively debate between structuralists and neoclassical economists (Lehmann, 1978). While structuralists stressed the unequal and bimodal land tenure system, the neoclassical economists emphasized public policy which in their view discriminated against agriculture.

Subsequently the paper analyses the causes and objectives of agrarian reform. While governments often used agriculture's poor growth record as a justification for agrarian reform legislation, they were mainly driven by internal as well as external pressures. Social conflicts escalated in the countryside as peasants and rural workers were less willing to tolerate poor living standards, exploitative working conditions and a marginal position in society. The spread of urban influences into the countryside had begun to undermine patron-client relationships and increased the influence of political parties and other urban groups willing to support the organization of peasants and rural workers into trade unions and other associations confident enough to challenge the landlords' domination (Kay, 1980).

The collectivist character of the more significant agrarian reforms in Latin America is then highlighted, and the impact of the agrarian reforms on production, income distribution, employment, poverty, gender relations and socio-political integration is discussed. The paper provides only a general analysis of these issues, because the situation differed between countries and because methodological problems and the

inadequacy of the available statistical data make the evaluation difficult even in the case of specific country studies.

Finally, the paper explores the impact of neoliberal land policies in those countries where they have been followed for a significant period. For countries that have recently taken this path, it is only possible to make informed guesses as to the likely outcome by drawing on the results of the neoliberal pioneers.

AGRICULTURE'S PERFORMANCE PRIOR TO AGRARIAN REFORM

Latin America's agricultural growth record in the period following the Second World War was poor, especially with respect to domestic food production. Agricultural production² grew at an annual rate of 2.6 percent between 1934 and 1960 (ECLA, 1963).³ However, owing to high rates of population growth, agricultural production per caput grew only marginally, i.e. by only 0.3 percent between 1950 and 1964 (ECLA, 1968). Not until the late 1950s did agricultural production per caput reach pre-war levels (ECLA, 1963).

Although agricultural exports grew faster than domestic food crop production, Latin America's position in the world agricultural market deteriorated. Food imports increased by 44 percent between 1948-1952 and 1965, while agricultural exports increased only 26 percent (ECLA, 1968). By comparison, world agricultural exports grew by 50 percent in the same period, which indicates Latin America's relative decline in world markets. Agriculture's net contribution to foreign exchange earnings deteriorated, placing an additional strain on Latin America's balance of payment problems.

Agriculture in Latin America was inefficient and wasteful of resources, mainly land and labour. A highly unequal land tenure system was largely to blame, but inadequate government support for agriculture was also

a factor. Most agricultural growth stemmed from an increase in area cultivated rather than an increase in yields. Extensive growth without major technical and social transformations clearly predominated over intensification of agriculture. The contrast with the developed world is striking. In Latin America the area cultivated increased by 24 percent and yields by 7 percent between the periods 1948 to 1952 and 1957 to 1959, while in Europe the corresponding figures were 3 percent and 24 percent, respectively (ECLA, 1963).⁴ From the 1850s to the 1930s the hacienda system (often referred to as the *latifundio-minifundio* complex) expanded and achieved a dominant position within Latin America's agrarian structure. This expansion was often achieved by displacing the rural indigenous population to marginal areas. In this golden age of the hacienda system, landlords were at the height of their economic power, political influence and social prestige. Only in Mexico was the dominance of the hacienda system successfully challenged by the revolutionary upheavals of 1910 to 1917. However, it was not until the era of the populist government of Cárdenas (1934 to 1940) that the hacienda system finally lost its predominant influence in Mexico. The Bolivian revolution of the early 1950s also dealt a major blow to the landlord system with the implementation of an extensive agrarian reform programme.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 signalled the final demise of the hacienda system in most Latin American countries. Fearful of the spread of revolution to other countries in the region and the spectre of socialism, the United States Government launched the Alliance for Progress initiative, which encouraged governments throughout the region to implement agrarian reform programmes by providing economic aid. Consequently, from the 1960s to the 1970s a number of countries in Latin America undertook agrarian reforms, among them Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. In the

² Including crops and livestock but excluding forestry.

³ When sugar, cotton and banana export crops are excluded the agricultural growth rate falls to 2.2 percent per annum (1934 to 1960).

⁴ It is unlikely that the differences in resource endowments between Latin America and Europe can explain such lack of agricultural intensification in Latin America.

late 1970s and 1980s, following the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the civil war in El Salvador, agrarian reforms were also carried out in those countries. Only in Argentina has agrarian reform been completely absent. In Brazil strong opposition from landlords stalled any significant agrarian reform, but there has been some minor land redistribution since the restoration of democratic rule in the mid-1980s (de Souza Leite, 1994; FAO, 1996).

Prior to agrarian reform Latin American governments had adopted policies encouraging the modernization of the hacienda system. The introduction of import-substitution industrialization policies after the Second World War had already begun to transform the traditional hacienda system. Such government measures as subsidized credits for the purchase of agricultural machinery and equipment, improved livestock, fertilizers and high-yielding-variety seeds and technical assistance programmes were intended to stimulate the technological modernization of large landed estates. The social relations of production had also begun to change. Labour-service tenancies and to some extent sharecropping began to give way to wage labour (Goodman and Redclift, 1981). Some landlords sold part of their estates to finance improvements on the remainder of their property, thereby advancing a process of "transformation from above" (Kay, 1988a). This process paradoxically gained momentum with the agrarian reform. It is ironic that many agrarian reforms in Latin America resulted in the modernization of the hacienda system and its transformation into capitalist farms rather than its elimination from below by redistributing hacienda land to peasants. In this sense many agrarian reforms initially accelerated an already established path from landlord system to agrarian capitalism rather than the development of peasant farming (de Janvry, 1981; Kay 1988a). However, as will be seen later, the subsequent unravelling of agrarian reforms has opened up the possibility of a peasant road to agrarian capitalism, albeit one subordinated to agro-industrial capital.

In explaining Latin America's poor agricultural performance, structuralists emphasize the high degree of land concentration while neoclassical and monetarist interpretations stress government policy, in particular price and trade policies which allegedly discriminated against agriculture (Valdés and Siamwalla, 1988). Government price controls on some essential food commodities and an exchange-rate policy that overvalued the local currency and thus made food imports cheaper and agricultural exports less profitable acted as disincentives to agricultural production (Valdés, Muchnik and Hurtado, 1990). While it is generally accepted today that the import-substitution industrialization policy adopted by most governments in Latin America discriminated against agriculture, the fact that large agricultural producers were often compensated, at least to some extent, by countervailing policies is generally ignored (Kay, 1977). For example, landlords received highly subsidized credits and benefited from cheap imports of agricultural machinery and inputs as a consequence of the above-mentioned trade policy, and they benefited from special technical assistance programmes. Thus government policy was biased not just against agriculture but within agriculture against peasants and rural workers (Kay, 1981).

While after the Second World War in many Latin American countries landlords no longer dominated the political system, they still exerted a major influence on government policy and could swing the power of the State in their favour regarding relations between landlords and peasants (Huber and Safford, 1995). Tenants had to pay high rents (either in money, in kind or in labour services) and agricultural workers were paid low wages and had poor working conditions. Rural labour was largely unorganized and confronted a series of legal obstacles impeding unionization. Working conditions throughout rural Latin America were exploitative and repressive (Duncan and Rutledge, 1977).

Latin America's bimodal agrarian structure was seen by structuralist and liberal reformists (largely from the United States) as

inegalitarian and inefficient and as having detrimental social and political consequences. While structuralists tended to favour cooperative or associative farming organizations, liberals championed family farming, although some also promoted cooperatives. It was argued that agrarian reform, by modifying the uneven income distribution, would widen the domestic market for industrial commodities, strengthen the industrialization effort by increasing the supply of agricultural commodities and have a beneficial impact on foreign exchange.

A powerful case for agrarian reform was made by reformist analysts who stressed that the high degree of land concentration was an inefficient use of resources. Large farms used land in an extensive manner which resulted in low land productivity, and much land remained uncultivated. Monoculture, which was generally adopted by plantations in areas of export agriculture, had deleterious effects on the environment. Extensive land use also limited employment opportunities and contributed to low labour productivity. Because of the relative abundance of agricultural workers and the high degree of land concentration, landlords could continue to pay low wages even where labour productivity had increased through investments (de Janvry, 1981). It was also held that land concentration hampered the adoption of modern technology, as landlords could obtain high incomes without intensifying production given the large amount of land they owned. Landlords also viewed their estates as a useful hedge against inflation. Ownership of a large landed estate also conferred high social status and political power. Thus farming efficiency was not always a priority for landlords. Reformists also blamed land concentration for the social inequality, marginalization and poor living conditions of the majority of the rural population in Latin America (Feder, 1971).

With respect to prices, structuralists were the first to highlight the deterioration of Latin America's terms of trade. The decreasing purchasing power of agricultural exports in terms of industrial imports was a

disincentive. Structuralists argued that price incentives, which were emphasized by the neoclassical economists, were unlikely to improve agricultural efficiency and growth rate, as *latifundistas* reacted slowly to them and they did not often induce the modernization of the enterprise.

Minifundistas also failed to react positively to price incentives, but for different reasons, such as lack of resources and technical knowledge. Although later studies show that structuralists may have underestimated the positive effect of price incentives, it does not follow that they would have been a better policy tool than agrarian reform for achieving growth with equity in the countryside. Furthermore, many studies that found farmers to be more responsive to market mechanisms than structuralists had presumed were undertaken after agrarian reform measures had been introduced. Just as it can be argued that structuralists underestimated the dynamic potential of landlords, so it can be argued that neoclassical economists underestimated the negative effects of Latin America's agrarian structure for economic development. While structuralists pinned their hopes on agrarian reform, neoclassical thinkers placed theirs in free markets. Following the implementation of agrarian reform and the more recent experiments with free markets, a consensus is emerging that both courses are needed to attain growth with equity.

THE BIMODAL LAND TENURE SYSTEM

The Alliance for Progress prompted a comprehensive study of Latin America's agrarian structure during the first half of the 1960s. In the mid-1960s the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development (CIDA)⁵ published reports on seven countries: Argentina (1965), Brazil (1966),

⁵ CIDA was set up in 1961 by the Organization of American States (OAS); the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, known today as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA); FAO; and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), later renamed the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Colombia (1966), Chile (1966), Ecuador (1965), Guatemala (1965) and Peru (1966). These were later followed by two or three other country reports. The CIDA studies (reviewed in Barraclough, 1973; Barraclough and Domike, 1966) represent the most ambitious collective study to date of Latin America's land tenure. They had a major influence on shaping a certain view of the Latin American agrarian question as well as on the design of agrarian reform policies. They conveyed a bimodal view of Latin America's land tenure system and were used by governments to lend scientific weight to the case for agrarian reform legislation.

Latin America had one of the most unequal agrarian structures in the world. At one extreme were the *minifundistas*, who owned very small landholdings (*minifundios*); at the other were the *latifundistas*, who owned very large landholdings (*latifundios*) in the form of plantations, haciendas and *estancias*. By 1960 *latifundistas* owned roughly 5 percent of farm units and about four-fifths of the land, while *minifundistas* owned four-fifths of farm units but had only 5 percent of the land (Barraclough, 1973). The middle-sized farm sector was relatively insignificant. Although subsequent studies have shown this bimodal characterization to be exaggerated – tenants had a significant degree of control over resources within the estates, and medium farmers had access to better land and were more capitalized and thus contributed more to agricultural output than originally estimated – Latin America still had one of the most polarized agrarian systems in the world.

Peasant holdings were the main providers of employment, accounting for about half of the agricultural labour force, of which four-fifths were unpaid family workers. Large estates employed less than one-fifth of the agricultural labour force (Barraclough, 1973). In 1960 an estimated one-third of the total agricultural labour force was landless and a variety of tenancy arrangements were widespread; approximately one-quarter of agricultural workers (or more) were tenants or squatters (Barraclough, 1973).

This agrarian system was inefficient. On the one hand, *latifundios* underutilized land by

farming it in an extensive manner and leaving a significant proportion uncultivated. On the other hand, *minifundios* were wasteful of labour, using too much labour on too little land. Not surprisingly, while labour productivity was much higher on *latifundios* than on *minifundios*, the reverse was the case regarding land productivity. In the 1950s and early 1960s, average production per agricultural worker was about five to ten times higher on *latifundios* than on *minifundios*, while production per hectare of agricultural land was roughly three to five times higher on *minifundios* than on *latifundios* (Barraclough, 1973). Given that much rural labour was unemployed or underemployed and land was relatively scarce, it was more important from a developmental perspective to raise land productivity than to increase labour productivity. Proponents of agrarian reform argued that land productivity could be increased more easily by redistributing land than by making costly investments in modern technology, which might also displace labour. Furthermore, agrarian reform was likely to have a far more favourable impact on income distribution than an exclusive emphasis on modern technology.

The land tenure and labour structure had begun to change prior to the implementation of agrarian reforms. In the changing political climate of the 1950s and 1960s, landlords foresaw the prospect of agrarian reform legislation and took evasive action. In order to avoid expropriation, some landlords reduced the size of their estates by subdividing them among family members or by selling some land. In addition, landlords aimed to reduce the internal pressure for land from tenants who, as agricultural producers, were keen to expand their tenancy and reduce rent payments. Landlords avoided this internal pressure by reducing the number of tenants and replacing permanent workers with seasonal wage labourers, who had fewer legal rights than permanent wage labourers and could be more easily dismissed or laid off as the situation demanded. Mechanization allowed landlords to reshape the composition of their

labour force and to reduce it substantially, thereby further weakening internal pressures for land redistribution and higher wages.

As noted above, the mere threat of an agrarian reform can precipitate the breakup and capitalization of the hacienda. Agrarian reform legislation generally exempted farms below a certain size and in some cases modern and efficient farms that exceeded this limit. Landlords attempted to evade expropriation by subdividing and modernizing their estates. Farm efficiency was often judged by the presence of machinery and the use of wage labour rather than tenant labour. Tenancies were particularly frowned upon, as they were considered part of a feudal and oppressive labour regime.

The medium-sized capitalist farm sector also expanded, especially in those countries where agrarian reform legislation allowed landlords to retain part of their estate after expropriation, i.e. when they had the right to a "reserve" (*reserva*), as in Chile. Landlords generally retained the heart of the hacienda, which encompassed the best land and the main farm buildings. In addition, landlords often retained their livestock and agricultural machinery which, concentrated on a smaller farm, improved both the capital/land ratio and the capital/labour ratio.

CAUSES AND OBJECTIVES OF AGRARIAN REFORM

The most far-reaching agrarian reforms have tended to be the outcome of social revolutions. Such was the case in Mexico (1917), Bolivia (1952), Cuba (1959) and Nicaragua (1979). However, radical agrarian reforms were also undertaken by elected governments, as in Chile during the Frei (1964 to 1970) and Allende (1970 to 1973) administrations, or even by military regimes, as in Peru during the government of General Velasco Alvarado (1969 to 1975). Agrarian reforms that were less wide ranging (in terms of the amount of land expropriated and the number of peasant beneficiaries) were carried out largely by civilian governments in the rest of Latin America. The major exception is Argentina, where to date no agrarian reform has taken place and agrarian reform has not

formed part of the political agenda. The uniqueness of the Argentine case is explained in part by the relative importance of family farming and middle-sized capitalist farms as well as by the relatively high degree of urbanization. Paraguay and Uruguay had colonization programmes but in neither country has a significant agrarian reform taken place.

Agrarian reforms have generally been the outcome of political changes from above. Although in some instances these were responding to social pressures from below, few agrarian reforms in Latin America were the direct result of peasant uprisings. However, although the peasantry was not an important social force behind the reform legislation, it did significantly influence the reform process. Those areas where rural protest was strongest tended to receive the most attention from agrarian reform agencies.

Urban social forces and even international forces, as in the case of the Alliance for Progress, played an important part in bringing about agrarian reform. Technocratic and reformist governments seeking to modernize agriculture and integrate the peasantry often initiated agrarian reforms. Not surprisingly, they confronted opposition from landlords, who sometimes succeeded in blocking or reversing the legislation. Agrarian reforms are social processes whose unintended consequences may redirect the initial purpose of the reform along radical or conservative lines (but usually the latter) or may in some instances derail it completely.

In Guatemala, President Arbenz's agrarian reform of 1952 was brought to an abrupt end in 1954 when he was overthrown by an armed invasion which received support from the United States Government. Arbenz's agrarian reform measures, which had expropriated about one-fifth of the country's arable land and benefited close to one-quarter of the peasantry, were quickly reversed (Brockett, 1988). In Chile, Frei's moderate agrarian reform of 1964 to 1970 fuelled demands from the peasant movement for intensification of the reform process. The radicalization of the peasant movement was a factor helping Allende to win the presidency

in 1970. Peasant radicalism in turn pushed Allende's democratic socialist programme for expropriations beyond its original intent (Kay, 1978). The subsequent military coup of 1973, which repressed and disarticulated the peasant movement, returned only part of the expropriated land to former owners. Despite its political power, the military government did not dare to undo the agrarian reform completely.

In espousing agrarian reform, governments were pursuing a variety of objectives. A major objective, and the primary one for more technocratic types of agrarian reform, was a higher rate of agricultural growth. Thus only inefficient estates were to be expropriated and more entrepreneurially run estates were encouraged to modernize further. It was expected that as a result less land would be left idle and land would be cultivated more intensely, and that agricultural output would therefore increase. Another economic (and social) objective was equity. It was thought that a fairer distribution of income would facilitate the import-substituting industrialization process by widening the domestic market for industrial goods. A more dynamic agricultural sector would lower food prices, generate more foreign exchange and create more demand for industrial commodities. Thus the underlying economic objective was to speed up the country's industrialization process.

Agrarian reforms also had social and political objectives. By distributing land to peasants, governments hoped to ease social conflicts in the countryside and to gain the peasantry's political support. Land redistribution and measures assisting the creation or strengthening of peasant organizations were also undertaken to incorporate the peasantry into the social and political system. Giving peasants a stake in society would strengthen civil society and the democratic system. More radical agrarian reformers were particularly keen to organize and mobilize the peasantry in order to weaken landlord opposition to expropriation.

Governments also aimed to increase their support among the industrial bourgeoisie whose economic interests could be furthered

by agrarian reform. However, this objective was more problematic, as industrialists often had close ties with the landed class and were fearful that social mobilization in the countryside could spill over into urban areas. Political links between landlords and the urban bourgeoisie were far closer than commonly thought, and the bourgeois generally placed their political interests before short-term economic gains. They were well aware that agrarian reforms could gain momentum and spark urban unrest, perhaps leading to worker demands for higher wages, better working conditions and even the expropriation of urban enterprises. The Chilean agrarian reform experience is a good illustration of just such a situation. The increasing demands and mobilization of rural and urban workers strengthened the alliance of the rural and urban bourgeoisie, including some middle-class sectors. In Peru the progressive military government of Velasco Alvarado undertook a sweeping agrarian reform in the expectation that it would help the country's industrialization process. However, the government failed to win the support of the industrial bourgeoisie for such a development project and was unable to persuade expropriated landlords to invest their agrarian reform bonds, paid out as compensation for expropriated land, in industrial ventures. The reluctance of the industrial bourgeoisie was not surprising given that the government was creating a social property sector in which the State would control all major industrial and commercial firms and allow a degree of worker participation.

Although agrarian reforms were largely instituted from above, once expropriation was under way conflicts in the countryside often escalated. Peasants demanded a widening and deepening of the agrarian reform process, while landlords opposed such demands and put pressure on the government and in some instances on the armed forces to suppress the increasingly bold actions of the peasants. This was particularly the case in countries where political parties and other organizations used a reformist opening in the country's political

system to strengthen peasant organizations and assist their social mobilization. Support, or lack of it, from urban-based political parties and urban social groups was often crucial in determining the outcome of the reform process.

SCOPE OF AGRARIAN REFORM EXPERIENCES

The scope of agrarian reform in Latin America varied greatly as regards both the amount of land expropriated and the number of peasant beneficiaries. The agrarian reforms in Bolivia and Cuba were the most extensive with respect to the amount of land expropriated: about four-fifths of the country's agricultural land. In Mexico, Chile, Peru and Nicaragua almost half the country's agricultural land was expropriated. In Colombia, Panama, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic between one-sixth and one-quarter of the agricultural land was expropriated (Cardoso and Helwege, 1992). A smaller proportion of agricultural land was affected by agrarian reform in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Honduras and Uruguay (ECLAC and FAO, 1986). In Venezuela about one-fifth of the land was affected by the agrarian reform, but almost three-quarters of this had previously belonged to the State and was largely in areas to be colonized. Thus Venezuela's agrarian reform was mainly a colonization programme.

Cuba, Bolivia and Mexico were the countries in which the highest proportion of peasants and rural workers benefited from the agrarian reform. In Cuba and Bolivia about three-quarters of agricultural households were incorporated into the reformed sector, while in Mexico the proportion was less than half. In Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela the proportion of beneficiaries was about one-third, in El Salvador one-quarter and in Chile one-fifth. In Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Costa Rica the proportion of all agricultural families that benefited from land redistribution varied from slightly less than one-tenth to slightly more than one-tenth (Cardoso and Helwege, 1992; Dorner, 1992). In other countries the proportion was even lower.

The fact that the agrarian reforms with the

widest scope were the outcome of revolutions indicates the importance of the question of political power. Where landlords were defeated and displaced from power, the agrarian reform was wide in scope. In some instances, however, landlords have been able to reverse some or all of the gains of the agrarian reform following a major political upheaval such as a counterrevolution or military *coup d'état*.

Once the agrarian reform process has been initiated peasants have sometimes been able to push it further than intended or to redirect it according to their interests. For example, peasant communities (*comuneros*) in Peru which had been excluded from land in the reformed sector, and which could only benefit from the profits generated by the reformed enterprises, later gained direct access to land from the reformed sector. As few reformed enterprises made any profits, and given the shortage of land in peasant communities and the peasants' historical claims (real or imagined) to the land of the expropriated haciendas, the peasants' claim to a share of the former estates is understandable. After violent clashes between *comuneros* and the police, significant amounts of land were transferred from the reformed enterprises to the peasant communities.

In Nicaragua, where the agrarian reform policy had privileged State farms since 1979, peasants succeeded in pressing the Sandinista government to adopt a less State-centred reform policy. After 1984 some reformed enterprises were transferred directly to peasant beneficiaries in either cooperative or individual ownership. This shift in policy was also provoked by the desire to reduce the influence of the *contras* among the peasantry and to stimulate food production (Utting, 1992). Following the policy change, the amount of expropriated land redistributed to peasant beneficiaries in individual ownership trebled from 8 percent in the period from 1981 to 1984 to 24 percent in the period from 1985 to 1988 (Enríquez, 1991). The new policy also modified the earlier advantage given to State farms by granting peasant beneficiaries more favourable access to scarce inputs. However, because of civil war

and the resulting economic deterioration of the country, peasants still faced a difficult situation. In Colombia, Ecuador and currently in Brazil, peasants have also resorted to land invasions which resulted in expropriation and access to land (Petras, 1997; Veltmeyer, 1997). Nevertheless these land invasions lacked the scope and significance of those in Mexico, Chile and Peru.

In many Latin American countries, however, peasants were not able to extend the expropriation process or to prevent landlords from blocking or reversing the process. In most Latin American countries the scope of agrarian reform remained limited in terms of land expropriated and peasant beneficiaries. Despite an explicit commitment to agrarian reform and peasant farming, a large majority of Latin American governments implemented timid agrarian reforms and failed to support peasant farming to any significant extent. Rhetoric prevailed as governments were either too weak to implement a substantial agrarian reform or had the underlying intention of promoting capitalist farming. William Thiesenhusen (1995a), the doyen among Latin Americanist agrarian reform experts, captures this reality well in the title of his recent book, *Broken promises: agrarian reform and the Latin American campesino*.

COLLECTIVIST CHARACTER OF THE REFORMED SECTOR

Collective and cooperative forms of organization within the reformed sector were, surprisingly, far more common than one might expect in the capitalist (with the exception of Cuba) context of Latin America. In Mexico, particularly since the Cárdenas government of the 1930s, the *ejido* has dominated in the reformed sector. The *ejido* is a collective type of organization, although farming is largely carried out on a household basis. Until recently it was illegal to sell *ejido* land. In Cuba, State farms have predominated since the early days of the revolution, and by the mid-1980s most individual peasant farmers had joined production cooperatives. Production cooperatives and State farms were the

dominant farm organization in Chile's reformed sector during the governments of Frei and Allende (1964 to 1973). This was also the case in Peru following Velasco Alvarado's agrarian reform of 1969 until the gradual dissolution of the collectives in the 1980s, in Nicaragua from the Sandinista revolution of 1979 until 1990, and in El Salvador during the Christian Democrat regime of 1980 to 1989. Only a small proportion of the expropriated land was distributed directly as private peasant family farms.

An important explanation for the statist and collectivist character of Latin America's most important agrarian reforms lies in their inherited agrarian structure. Prior to reform, large-scale farming prevailed in the form of plantations, haciendas and *estancias*. Governments feared that subdividing these large landed estates into peasant family farms might lead to a loss of economies of scale, reduce foreign exchange earnings as peasant farmers would switch from export-crop to food-crop production, impair technological improvements, limit the number of beneficiaries and reproduce the problems of the *minifundia*. Furthermore, a collective reformed sector reduced subdivision costs, allowed more direct government control over production and in some instances marketing, and could foster internal solidarity. In those countries pursuing a socialist path of development, such as Cuba, Allende's Chile and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, a collectivist emphasis was also underpinned by political and ideological factors. In some cases collective forms of organization were regarded as transitory, as in Chile and El Salvador. As beneficiaries gained entrepreneurial and technical experience a gradual process of decollectivization was envisaged.

Agrarian reform policy-makers throughout Latin America greatly underestimated the relative importance of peasant farming, such as sharecropping and labour-service tenancies, within large landed estates. National census data generally failed to record, or to record accurately, the number of peasant tenant enterprises within the hacienda system (the "internal peasant

economy”). This led policy-makers to underestimate the difficulties of organizing collective farming and the pressure that beneficiaries would exercise within the collective enterprise for the expansion of their own family enterprises. The new managers of the collective reformed enterprises, generally appointed by the State, had far less authority over the beneficiaries than landlords had and were unable to prevent the gradual erosion of the collective enterprise from within.

The enduring influence of the pre-reform large landed enterprises on the situation after reform is startling. In this sense the collectivist character of the reformed sector should not be overstated, as it was often more apparent than real. For example, in Peru about half the agricultural land of the reformed sector (collective and State farms) was cultivated on an individual basis. In Chile and El Salvador the figure was about one-fifth, and only in Cuba was it insignificant. This reflects the varying degrees of capitalist development and proletarianization of the agricultural labour force in each of these countries before the agrarian reform.

The differences between types of estates, such as plantations and haciendas, were also reflected in the character of post-reform enterprises, as illustrated in the case of Peru. Prior to expropriation, the large coastal sugar plantations were capitalized and employed largely wage labour, whereas the domestic-market-oriented haciendas of the highlands relied much more on tenant labour. It was far easier to set up centralized and collective management systems on the expropriated sugar plantations than on the highland haciendas, and this had an important influence on the subsequent process of decollectivization.

A feature of Cuba's agrarian reforms (1959 and 1963) that is not often mentioned is the fact that Castro's government greatly extended peasant proprietorship, giving ownership titles to an estimated 160 000 tenants, sharecroppers and squatters. Before the revolution, peasant farmers had only numbered about 40 000 (Ghai, Kay and Peek, 1988). Cuba's agriculture was

dominated by sugar plantations and the agricultural labour force was largely proletarian. A large proportion of seasonal sugar-cane cutters came from urban areas. The plantation sector was taken over by the State without much difficulty. Over time State farms were amalgamated into even larger units, becoming giant agro-industrial complexes under the direct control of either the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Sugar. Cuban policy-makers were great believers in the tenet “large is beautiful”. It was not until almost two decades after the revolution that the Cuban leadership launched a campaign for the cooperativization of peasant farmers. Peasants were encouraged to form agricultural and livestock production cooperatives (*cooperativas de producción agropecuaria* or CPA), having resisted joining State farms, and within a decade over two-thirds of all peasant farmers had done so. CPAs were clearly outperforming State farms (Kay, 1988b) and they became an example to State farms, eventually leading to their transformation as will be discussed later.

IMPACT OF AGRARIAN REFORMS

The success or failure of agrarian reforms is a subject of much controversy. Few comprehensive evaluations of agrarian reforms have been undertaken to date, and in those few cases the answers are not always clear-cut as a consequence of the complexity of the task. Evaluations vary according to the criteria used, the weight given to each of these criteria and the period considered. A long-term evaluation can lead to a completely different assessment than one carried out sooner. As the agrarian reform process is itself protracted, a long-term evaluation can only be undertaken three or more decades from the start. While a longer-term perspective might be more appropriate, this also is not without difficulties as other factors intervene to influence the outcome of an agrarian reform. It is notoriously difficult to attribute a particular outcome to the agrarian reform, let alone to make any precise measurement of its impact. Thus any evaluation should be treated with caution.

Agrarian reforms can be assessed in narrow economic terms or in broader systemic and institutional terms. They can be evaluated in terms of their impact on growth, employment, income distribution, poverty and socio-political participation as well as on the wider development context. More recent evaluations have included the impact of agrarian reforms on gender divisions and on the environment.

While agrarian reform may be a precondition for sustainable development, it is not a sufficient condition. Agrarian reform should not be regarded as a panacea for all the ills afflicting Latin American rural economies and societies, yet the initial campaigns and proposals for agrarian reform were often seen in this enthusiastic light. Agrarian reform was perceived as a way of liberating the peasantry from landlordism with its associated feudal and exploitative conditions. It was seen as a way of achieving equitable rural development which would reduce rural poverty. It was also considered important for facilitating Latin America's struggling industrialization process by expanding the domestic market and easing foreign exchange constraints.

Given that agrarian reforms were seen as a panacea, it is paradoxical that governments failed to provide the financial, technical, organizational and other institutional support needed to ensure their success. In many instances the continuation of import-substitution industrialization policies and the persistent discrimination against agriculture in terms of price, trade and credit policy made the task of creating a viable agrarian reform sector impossible. Clearly, mistakes in design and implementation of agrarian reforms also contributed to their eventual unravelling.

Most agrarian reforms failed to fulfil expectations for a variety of reasons. In some instances, agrarian reform was implemented in a half-hearted fashion by governments that paid lip service to agrarian reform for domestic or foreign political purposes, whether to gain votes from the peasantry or aid from international agencies. In other instances fierce political opposition from

landlords, sometimes with the support of sectors of the bourgeoisie, restricted the reforms.

Agricultural production

The impact of agrarian reform on agricultural production has been mixed. Most analysts agree that results fall well below expectations. In Mexico, agricultural production increased by 325 percent from 1934 to 1965, the highest rate in Latin America during this period. This growth, however, was the result of the impetus given to agrarian reform by the Cárdenas government and the supportive measures for agricultural development; since that period Mexican agricultural performance has been poor (Thiesenhusen, 1995a). Nevertheless, research has shown that farms within the *ejido* reform sector, which are predominantly farmed as individual family plots, are as productive as farms of equivalent size in the private sector (Heath, 1992). However, the most dynamic sector in Mexican agriculture is that of private middle-sized and large-scale farmers. During the last few decades these farmers have been the main beneficiaries of government policy which has favoured commercial agriculture and given little support to reform beneficiaries. Major government investments in irrigation and provision of subsidized credits have principally favoured large farmers and export agriculture while neglecting the *ejido* food-producing sector.⁶

In Bolivia, marketed agricultural output in the years immediately after agrarian reform declined as reform beneficiaries increased their own food consumption. With respect to production, some contend that levels were maintained while others argue that it took almost a decade for production to reach its pre-revolutionary level (Thiesenhusen, 1995a). Subsequently agricultural growth was achieved in large part through the colonization of the eastern lowlands, a process encouraged by the State and

⁶ It was only during 1980/81 that the Mexican government attempted to reinvigorate peasant agriculture and the *ejidos* by pursuing a food self-sufficiency policy (*Sistema alimentario mexicano* or SAM) financed by the influx of petrodollars and the boom in Mexico's oil export earnings.

designed to boost commercial farming and export agriculture.

In Chile, agrarian reform under Frei (1964 to 1970) initially had a very favourable impact on agricultural production. Production increased by an annual average rate of 4.6 percent between 1965 and 1968, three times faster than in the previous two decades (Kay, 1978). However, growth slowed down in the last two years of the Frei administration. Under the Allende government production increased significantly in the first year, stagnated during the second year and declined sharply in 1973 as a result of socio-political upheavals and input shortages. It is estimated that much of the initial increase in agricultural output came from the commercial farm sector, especially the *reservas*. This is not surprising given that landlords often kept the best land and farm equipment which enabled them to intensify production. The reformed sector performed reasonably well at first, receiving much government support in the form of credits, technical assistance, marketing facilities, mechanization and so on. This is not an insignificant achievement given that landlords had decapitalized their estates before expropriation. However, as the expropriation process escalated and strained the administrative and economic resources of the State, the reformed sector faced increasing problems. Internal organizational problems began to arise as beneficiaries devoted more time to their individual plots than to the collective enterprise.

In Peru the agrarian reform did not increase agricultural production from its low level. The growth rate of 1.8 percent from 1970 to 1976 was similar to the average pre-reform rate of the 1960s (Kay, 1982). During the period 1970 to 1980 the average annual growth rate of agriculture was negative, i.e. -0.6; a drought in 1978 and a severe economic recession in the late 1970s had negative consequences for agriculture (ECLAC, 1993). During the 1980s agriculture recovered, growing by 2 percent yearly, but this agricultural growth was still slower than annual population growth (2.2 percent) (IDB, 1993). The reformed sector, plagued with

internal conflicts between government-appointed managers and beneficiaries, was partly responsible for this poor performance. The State exacerbated matters by its failure to provide resources or adequate technical training to beneficiaries and by its continued adherence to a cheap-food policy which reduced the reformed sector's profitability. Furthermore, reformed enterprises experienced land invasions by highland peasant communities as well as the violent activities of the Shining Path guerrilla movement in the 1980s.

In Nicaragua a series of factors conspired against the economic success of the 1979 agrarian reform. In the decade before the agrarian reform agriculture had been stagnant. After agrarian reform in the 1980s agricultural output declined on average by 0.9 percent yearly (IDB, 1993). Armed conflict between the *contras* and the government severely disrupted production. Other contributing factors were the insecurity of tenure which inhibited investment by private farmers, the mass slaughter of livestock by farmers fearful of being expropriated, shortages of labour, disruption of the marketing system and mismanagement of the reformed enterprises (Enríquez, 1991).

In El Salvador the 1980 agrarian reform was implemented during a period of civil war which came to an end in 1992 (Seligson, 1995; Paige, 1996). Gross domestic product declined by 0.4 percent yearly, while agricultural production declined by 0.7 percent yearly in the 1980s (IDB, 1993). The commonly held view that individual farming is superior to collective farming is not borne out in El Salvador. Yields achieved on the collective land of the producer cooperatives of the reformed sector were often higher than yields on family plots either within or outside the reformed sector (Pelupessy, 1995).

Income distribution, employment and poverty

The gains in income distribution derived from agrarian reforms have been lower than anticipated. The redistributive effects are greater where more land is expropriated and distributed to a larger proportion of the rural population, especially the rural poor. The less

paid out in compensation to landlords and the less the beneficiaries have to pay for the land, especially if they include a large part of the rural poor, the greater will be the redistributive impact. Similarly, an agrarian reform has a greater redistributive effect in countries with a relatively large rural economy and population. The redistributive impact is also much influenced by social policy and by the performance of the economy as a whole. In Cuba, for example, the redistributive impact of agrarian reform was much higher than in Ecuador, not only because the agrarian reform was far less significant in Ecuador but because health and education policies in Cuba targeted the rural poor. In Peru, Velasco's agrarian reform redistributed only an estimated 1 to 2 percent of national income through land transfers to about one-third of peasant families (Figuroa, 1977). Sugar workers on the coast, already the best paid rural workers, benefited most while *comuneros*, the largest and poorest group among the peasantry, benefited least (Kay, 1983).

The initial positive redistributive impact of many agrarian reforms in Latin America was often cancelled out by the poor performance of the reformed sector (collective or private) and by macroeconomic factors such as unfavourable internal terms of trade and foreign exchange policy. If agriculture and the economy are stagnant, only poverty has been redistributed. In addition, by excluding the poorest segments of the rural population – members of peasant communities, *minifundista* smallholders and seasonal wage labourers – from land redistribution, many agrarian reforms increased socio-economic differentiation among the peasantry. Tenant labourers and permanent wage workers, who generally became full members of the reformed sector, sometimes continued landlord practices of employing outside seasonal labour for a low wage or renting out pastures or other reformed-sector resources to *minifundistas* and *comuneros*. They could thus be perceived by non-members as the new landlords. This was particularly the case in Peru, El Salvador and Nicaragua but also elsewhere in Latin America.

The income distribution effect of agrarian reform also depends on the reform's influence on employment. In Peru it is estimated that the rate of male agricultural employment trebled in the decade following the Peruvian agrarian reform but it was still growing only at a modest 0.9 percent per year (Kay, 1982). The net employment effects of the Chilean agrarian reform were also modest as rural outmigration continued unabated. The *reservas* used less labour per hectare than the former haciendas because of their higher degree of capitalization. In contrast, the reformed sector employed more labour per hectare, particularly family labour, than the former estates. However, in some reform enterprises the amount of land cultivated declined because of capital and input shortages, and this reduced the employment effect.

Given the disappointing record of agrarian reforms with respect to agricultural production, income distribution and employment, their impact on poverty alleviation is likely to be marginal. While standards of living generally improved for the direct beneficiaries of agrarian reform, these beneficiaries were not generally the poorest in rural society; except in Cuba, they did not include the *minifundistas*, seasonal wage labourers, *comuneros* or members of the indigenous communities who account for the largest share of the rural poor and particularly of the rural destitute. However, the Mexican and to some extent the Bolivian agrarian reforms did redistribute land to indigenous communities. In Peru after a decade of protests and land invasion of the reformed sector by *comuneros* some land was transferred to indigenous communities.

Any gains are easily eroded in periods of economic crisis. For example, any meagre improvements that may have benefited the rural poor in the agrarian reform period of the 1960s and 1970s were partially cancelled out during the so-called lost decade of the 1980s when Latin America was beset by debt crisis. Estimates of rural poverty vary because of the inadequacy of the data and the different methodologies and definitions

employed. At best, rural poverty remained constant during the 1980s, the improvements of the previous decades having been arrested (Feres and León, 1990), while the incidence of destitution increased from 28 to 31 percent of rural households (Altimir, 1994). At worst, rural poverty rose from 45 percent to over half of Latin America's rural population (*The Economist*, 1993).

Gender relations

In terms of reduction of gender inequalities the assessment is rather negative. Most land reform legislation ignored the position of women, failing to include them explicitly as beneficiaries, to give them land titles or to incorporate them into key administrative and decision-making processes in the cooperatives, State farms and other organizations emerging from the reform process. Even in Cuba, women made up only one-quarter of production cooperative members and were even fewer on State farms. In Mexico 15 percent of *ejido* members were women, while in Nicaragua and Peru women accounted for only 6 percent and 5 percent of cooperative members, respectively (Deere, 1987). Women were excluded as beneficiaries because of legal, structural and ideological factors. The stipulation that only one household member could become an official beneficiary, i.e. a member of the cooperative or receiver of a land title, tended to discriminate against women since households were usually headed by men (Deere, 1985). The agrarian reform in Chile reinforced the role of men as the main breadwinners and gave women only limited opportunities to participate in the running of the reformed sector, despite some legislation to the contrary as under the Allende government (Tinsman, 1996).

Socio-political integration: participation and stability

The greatest contribution of agrarian reforms may lie in the stimulus given to institution building in the countryside. Governments facilitated the organization of the peasantry into trade unions and cooperatives of various kinds, such as producer, marketing and credit associations. This brought about a

considerable degree of integration of the peasantry into the national economy, society and polity. Prior to reform, insurmountable obstacles blocked peasants from creating their own organizations. With the agrarian reforms, political parties began to vie for the peasant vote and extended their networks to rural areas where in the past reformist and left-wing political parties in particular had often been excluded by the landed oligarchy. Peasant participation in civil society was much enhanced. Many peasants, when granted a land title, felt that only then had they become citizens of the country. By weakening the power of landlords and other dominant groups in the countryside, agrarian reforms encouraged a greater organizational and participatory presence for the peasantry in local and national affairs. However, this greater voice was not shared by all categories of peasants or all regions of countries. There were also setbacks from which, in some instances, peasants have been unable to recover until today.

Agrarian reform programmes were usually accompanied by legislation or other measures to promote peasant organizations, through which governments often sought to extend and consolidate their influence in the countryside. Governments were more successful in gaining the allegiance of peasants from the reformed sector who were the direct beneficiaries of government patronage. However, they were not always able to keep their allegiance. Some peasant organizations came to regard government patronage as a hindrance and sought a degree of autonomy by breaking free from the government's co-optation.

In Mexico, agrarian reform clearly contributed to the stability of the political system (although not necessarily to its democratic development). For many decades the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) successfully co-opted the peasantry, but in recent years its hegemony has been challenged by a variety of political forces and its grip over the peasantry has loosened, as evidenced by the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas in southern Mexico. In Cuba the agrarian reform certainly strengthened the

Castro regime, as the reform was popular and benefited a large proportion of the rural labour force. In Bolivia the agrarian reform, by granting land to Amerindian peasants, reduced social conflicts in the countryside. The threat to political stability largely came from other social forces.

In the short term, however, agrarian reforms have tended to intensify social conflicts in the countryside and in society at large. In Chile, strikes and land seizures by farm workers escalated as peasants became organized, gained in self-confidence and had less to fear from repression. Landlords could no longer so easily dismiss striking farm workers nor count on swift retribution from the State against a peasant movement which was demanding an acceleration and extension of the expropriation process. The intensified conflicts in the countryside contributed to the military *coup d'état* which led to the violent overthrow of the Allende government and brought an end to the democratic system which had distinguished Chile from most other Latin American countries.

The agrarian reform in Chile brought about a major organizational effort. In 1965 only 2 100 rural wage workers were affiliated with agricultural trade unions; this figure increased to 140 000 in 1970 and to 282 000 by the end of 1972 (Kay, 1978). Thus about four-fifths of all rural wage workers were members of trade unions, an unusually high figure within the Latin American context. Following Allende's overthrow peasant organizations were weakened to such an extent that they have found it very difficult to rebuild and to recover their influence since the end of Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990.

In Peru the military government of Velasco Alvarado set up the peasant organization Confederación Nacional Agraria (CNA), through the Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social (SINAMOS), as a rival to the autonomous peasant organization Confederación Campesina del Perú (CCP) which was founded in 1947. However, CNA became increasingly independent of government tutelage, demanding a more

radical expropriation process and a greater say in the running of the reformed enterprises which were largely managed by the State. As a result of CNA's growing independence and strength (at one point CNA had twice as many members as CCP), the government dissolved it in 1978. Conflicts between agrarian reform beneficiaries and peasant communities, in which *comuneros* invaded the land of the reformed sector, subsided when the government transferred some of the reformed-sector land to the peasant communities. Although the Shining Path guerrilla movement was partly spawned by the agrarian reform, it failed to take root in the countryside, especially in those regions with the greatest agrarian reform activity.

In Nicaragua the Sandinista agrarian reform also provoked a major effort to organize the peasantry (Enríquez, 1997). The government helped to set up the Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG) in 1981, and by 1987 one-fifth of all agricultural workers had joined (Blokland, 1992). UNAG also managed to wrench a greater degree of autonomy from the State over time, and it has remained the most important peasant and farmer organization in the countryside to this day.

Agrarian reforms were often restricted in scope and thwarted in their aims by opposition forces or by government mismanagement. However, in those countries where agrarian transformation went deepest and where poverty and social exclusion were significantly reduced, social stability and political integration are taking hold and facilitating economic development. Hence it is possible to argue that, from a longer-term perspective, agrarian reforms have promoted social stability, if still precarious, and made a major contribution to the democratization of society. While agrarian reforms marked a watershed in the history of rural society in many Latin American countries, the root causes of social and political instability will remain as long as relatively high levels of rural poverty and peasant marginalization persist.

It can be concluded from the above that agrarian reforms provide a framework for

growth, equity and sustainable development in rural society only when accompanied by complementary policies and appropriate macroeconomic measures. While agrarian reforms are clearly facilitated by a favourable external environment, internal transformations remain critical for determining their outcome. Rather than regarding agrarian reform as a panacea, it is best to see it as an instrument of transformation, albeit an important one, for the achievement of these objectives.

LAND POLICY IN THE NEOLIBERAL PERIOD

The neoliberal winds sweeping through Latin America (and indeed the world) since the 1980s have had major consequences for the rural sector. Agro-industrial, marketing, technical assistance, banking and other State enterprises which had provided a series of subsidized services to farmers and peasants have been privatized. Reforms in the foreign trade regime and removal of price controls changed relative prices, giving an incentive to agricultural exports. Commercial farmers were best able to adapt to the changing circumstances and to exploit some of the profitable export opportunities, particularly in non-traditional agro-exports. By contrast, peasant farmers were ill equipped to meet the neoliberal challenge, given their traditional disadvantage in the market, which was far from being a level playing field. However, a minority of peasant groups – those with better resource endowment, entrepreneurial skills, locational advantages (in terms of closeness to markets and agro-climatic conditions) or access to development programmes of NGOs – have adapted successfully.

In place of agrarian reform, neoliberalism favours a land policy that emphasizes free markets and security of property rights. An active and free land market is seen to result in the allocation of land to the most able producers. Security of tenure would stimulate long-term investment. A large proportion of peasant farmers, especially in regions of colonization, had no titles or insecure ones. International agencies such as the World Bank and NGOs financed

programmes of land registration and titling throughout Latin America (Stanfield, 1985). It was argued that secure and transparent property rights would facilitate land transactions and give producers access to credit in the formal financial market, as they could use their property as collateral.

Neoliberals also favour individual property rights over collective or communal systems, as they are seen to lead to greater efficiency and market transparency. The neoliberals thus encouraged governments to introduce measures to facilitate the privatization of the communally held land of indigenous peasant communities as well as the breakup of the collective reformed sector (Bretón, 1997; Zoomers, 1997). In some cases these neoliberal measures formalized an ongoing unravelling of the collectivist reformed sector (and of communal arrangements within peasant communities). As a result of mismanagement and inadequate State support, the beneficiaries began to look for individual solutions to the collectives' problems. This generally meant that they expanded their own peasant economy within the reformed sector. Collective agriculture encountered the familiar problems of inadequate individual work incentives and free riders. Beneficiaries were generally paid the same wage regardless of work performance. Some members did not even bother to show up for work and many began to work for less than five hours per day. Management controls were often lax and collective resources and inputs were often misused or privately appropriated. Profits, if they did materialize, were often redistributed instead of being invested. At times management was too remote, failing to consult or involve members of the collective in decision-making. This pressure on collective agriculture was exacerbated by land seizures by peasants living in indigenous peasant communities or in smallholder (*minifundia*) areas who had been left out of the agrarian reform process.

With the installation of neoliberal governments, be they democratic or military, the cooperative, collective and State farms were broken up. Under the neoliberal reforms

and the parcellation of the reformed sector, the former hacienda peasants who had become land reform beneficiaries now became the new owners of plots of land. The growth of this new group, known as *parceleros* after the parcel of land (*parcela*), has greatly expanded the peasant farm sector in many Latin American countries. Chile was the first to initiate this process, in late 1973; Peru has followed in a more gradual manner since 1980, Nicaragua since 1990 and Mexico and El Salvador since 1992. Some expropriated land has been returned to former owners (particularly in Chile), but most has been distributed as parcels of private property to members of the reformed sector. In some countries many members of the reformed sector were unable to secure a parcel and joined the ranks of the rural proletariat. The parcellation process doubled or even trebled the land area under the ownership of the peasant farm sector. The extent to which this process will lead to the development of a peasant road to agrarian capitalism remains to be seen. A number of peasants who initially gained access to a piece of land were unable to keep up their repayments or finance their farm operations and had to sell. The process of parcellation has turned sour for many who face impoverishing peasantization or complete proletarianization.

In Chile, under the counterreform of Pinochet's military government, about 30 percent of expropriated land was returned to former owners, almost 20 percent was sold to private individuals or institutional investors, and about half remained in the reformed sector (Jarvis, 1992). The reformed sector itself was subdivided into parcels or *unidades agrícolas familiares* (agricultural family units). Less than half of the original beneficiaries were unable to obtain a parcel because the size of the reformed sector was reduced by half through the counterreform and because parcels were relatively generous, averaging about 9 basic irrigated hectares. A basic irrigated hectare (b.i.h.) is a unit of high-quality land, so parcels with low-quality land were larger than 9 physical hectares and commonly varied between 11 and 15 ha.

Parcels were, on average, roughly nine times larger than *minifundias*. In the allocation of parcels there was clear political discrimination against peasant activists who were expelled from the reformed sector. The *parceleros* had to buy the land from the State, at a price of about half its market value. Furthermore, in subsequent years about half of the *parceleros* lost their land because they were unable to repay the debts they incurred to purchase a parcel or because they lacked capital, management and market experience.

A notable difference between pre-reform (1965) and post-counterreform (1986) land tenure structure in Chile is that the 5 to 20 b.i.h. farm sector has more than doubled, while the large-farm sector (more than 80 b.i.h.) has been reduced by more than half (Kay, 1993). The striking growth of the 5 to 20 b.i.h. farm sector, which presently comprises about one-quarter of the country's agricultural land, was largely the result of parcellation. The sector is composed of middle-sized and rich peasant farmers as well as small capitalist farmers. The formation of *reservas* and the partial restoration of expropriated estates to former landlords has also led to a significant expansion of the medium-to-large capitalist farm sector (i.e. 20 to 80 b.i.h.), which accounts for almost one-third of the country's land. Large farms of over 80 b.i.h. have little in common with the former haciendas and account for about one-quarter of the country's land. Average farm size in this sector (about 125 b.i.h.) is much reduced from that of the average hacienda (235 b.i.h.) (Jarvis, 1992). More important, the social and technical relations of production have been completely transformed, and today the large farms are thoroughly modern capitalist farms. Many medium-sized and large capitalist farms shifted their production pattern to non-traditional agricultural exports which have formed the backbone of Chile's agro-export boom of the past two decades. Few *parceleros*, let alone *minifundistas*, have been able to engage in agro-export production and to reap any benefits of this boom (Murray, 1997).

In Peru, agricultural production cooperatives on the coast, with the exception of the sugar cooperatives, were subdivided into parcels or family farms and transferred to members of the cooperative. The parcels were typically between 3 and 6 ha in size and averaged 4.5 ha. In the highlands part of the land of the cooperatives was transferred collectively to adjacent peasant communities (a process referred to as *redimensionamiento*) and part was distributed as parcels to individual members of the cooperative.⁷ It has taken many years to legalize this land transfer and titling process and the process is still ongoing. The Peruvian parcellation process is the largest to date in Latin America. The sector comprising farms of less than 10 ha, of which a significant part is parcels, currently controls about one-half of Peru's agricultural land and about two-thirds of the country's livestock (Eguren, 1997). But lack of finance, among other factors, greatly hampers the development of the *parcelero* farm sector.

Agrarian reform and the subsequent unravelling of the reformed sector has thus given rise to a more complex agrarian structure. It has reduced and transformed the *latifundia* system and enlarged the peasant sector and the commercial middle- and middle-to-large-farm sector. Decollectivization has also increased heterogeneity among the peasantry as the levelling tendencies of collectivist agriculture have been removed. Following the introduction of neoliberal policies the commercial-farmer road to agrarian capitalism is gaining the upper hand. Capitalist farmers are the ones to benefit from the liberalization of land, labour and financial markets, the further opening of the economy to international competition, the new drive towards exports and the withdrawal of supportive measures for the peasant sector. Their greater land, capital and technical resources, their superior links with national and especially international markets and their greater influence on

⁷ However, some of the large-scale livestock cooperatives in the Central Highlands have not yet been subdivided.

agricultural policy ensure that they are more able to exploit the new market opportunities than peasant farmers.

Cuba has not remained unaffected by the neoliberal consensus. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the transition of the former socialist countries from a planned to a market system, Cuba has also had to make some adjustments, although still within its socialist system. Greater opportunities and economic incentives have been provided for peasant farmers and producer cooperatives. In 1994 private agricultural markets were introduced where prices are not controlled by the State and where producers can sell any surplus production that remains when they have met their quota for the State market (Douzant-Rosenfeld, 1997). As a result of the increase in the achievement of the cooperative sector since late 1993, the enormous State-farm sector is being decentralized into cooperative-type management units through the creation of "basic units of cooperative production" (*unidades básicas de producción cooperativa*, UBPC). The UBPC members negotiate their production plans with the State but they own what they produce and can distribute any profits among themselves. The cooperative-farm sector is now far more important than the State-farm sector, which once owned four-fifths of Cuba's land. Indications are that UBPCs have significantly improved the performance of the former State farms (Deere, 1995).

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of agrarian reforms on agricultural output, rural poverty, income distribution and social and political participation is at best mixed. However, the institutional changes they involved have undoubtedly contributed to capitalist development. Land and labour markets have become more flexible and investment opportunities in agriculture have improved, thereby enhancing agriculture's responsiveness to macroeconomic policy and global market forces. The main legacy of agrarian reform is the part it has taken – albeit since the unravelling of the reformed

sector – in hastening the demise of the landed oligarchy and in clearing away the institutional debris which prevented the development of markets and the full commercialization of agriculture. Thus the main winners have been the capitalist farmers. Although a minority of *campesinos* gained some benefits, for the majority the promise of agrarian reform remains unfulfilled.

Poverty, exclusion and landlessness or near landlessness are still far too common in Latin America. Land issues have not yet been resolved, as is so clearly illustrated by the Chiapas uprising in Mexico (Burbach, 1994; Barkin, 1996) and the contemporary struggle for a piece of land by landless peasants in Brazil, spearheaded by the *Movimento sem Terra* (MST) (Petras, 1997). The Cardoso government has promised to grant land to 280 000 peasant households in Brazil. To date land has been distributed to over 100 000 of these households under pressure from the MST and as a result of its campaign of selective seizure of estates and massive demonstrations (*The Economist*, 1997).

The era of radical agrarian reforms, however, is over. Despite the continuing arguments by scholars and activists in favour of agrarian reform (Lipton, 1993; Barraclough, 1994; Thiesenhusen, 1995b) as well as the recent upsurge in ethnic and peasant movements for land redistribution in the region, there has been a shift from State-led and interventionist agrarian reform programmes to market-oriented land policies. Paradoxically, such land policies have been much driven from above by the State and international agencies. Thus future State interventions in the land tenure system are likely to be confined to a land policy that focuses not on expropriation but on progressive land tax, land settlement, colonization, land transfer and financing mechanisms, land markets, registration, titling and secure property rights. However, a variety of studies are indicating that such land policies are not turning out to be the promised panacea. While the potential benefits of clearly defined property rights may be substantial given that about half of rural

households lack land titles (Vogelgesang, 1996), the economic and socio-political context in which small farmers operate conspires against them. The evidence gathered so far shows that all that is achieved is a “modernizing of insecurity” (Jansen and Roquas, 1998; Thorpe, 1997). It has to be recognized that custom-based land titles as well as rental arrangements in rural communities often offer greater security and flexibility to peasants than World Bank-type land titling schemes. In the end peasants are the losers from these land titling projects because of their weak position in the market as well as in the political system which is unable to protect their land rights (Shearer, Lastarria-Cornhiel and Mesbah, 1990; Stanfield, 1992; Carter and Mesbah, 1993; Vogelgesang, 1997).

While the search for agrarian reform continues (Thiesenhusen, 1989), factors such as prices, markets, credit, technical assistance, wages, regionalization and globalization currently exercise a major influence on agriculture’s performance and the peasants’ well-being. It is vital for peasants and rural workers to organize and strengthen their representative institutions so that they can shape and secure their future survival in a world increasingly driven by globalizing forces. While major agrarian reforms, especially of a collectivist kind, are unlikely to recur, it is certainly premature to argue that current land policies and neoliberal measures are heralding the demise of the agrarian problem in Latin America; its resolution will still require changes in the unequal and exclusionary land tenure system.

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