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Agrarian Reform and Rural Democratization

By JONATHAN FOX

THE relationship between agrarian reform and democracy is not obvious. Does one require the other? For example, is genuine land reform a prerequisite for a consolidated democracy in the countryside? Or is it the other way around—that a genuine land reform can come only from a genuine democracy? On some level both might be true—that some progress on one front is needed to move forward on another.

Discussions about agrarian reform and democracy often confuse political process (who gets to participate in decision-making) with economic outcome (who benefits in the end). This distinction is important for many reasons. For one, governments can produce greater economic equality without political democracy, as many post-revolutionary experiences have shown. Greater equality is certainly good, but it is not the same as democracy. Peasants might want both. If they lack the political power and autonomy to hold governments accountable, the chances are that they will lose out in the long run.

Among those who agree that democracy refers to a political decision-making process, there is another level of confusion—many assume that democracy begins and ends with electoral party competition, no matter how biased against the poor. Some use this narrow definition in an effort to side-step the possibility that more pluralistic and accountable forms of governance could be created. For those interested in possible paths toward freer and fairer political systems, it is useful to focus on democratization as an on-going process. This process is especially slow and difficult in rural areas, in Latin America as in the Philippines.

The democratization of the countryside in Latin America develops very unevenly, in the realms of both society and the state. Within **civil society**, it involves the emergence and consolidation of social and political institutions capable of representing both the breadth and diversity of rural interests vis-a-vis the state. For the **state**, rural democratization requires effective majority rule as well as real accountability to its rural citizens. In this definition, democratization requires elections at all levels to give people choices, but how real those choices are depends largely on how well—and how democratically—they are able to organize in defense of their interests **in between** those elections.

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The Return to Civilian Rule in Latin America

What kinds of democracy does Latin America have today? Back in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, many Latin America countries had populist civilian governments, but most rural areas were dominated by some mix of "guns, goons and gold." A wave of military dictatorships swept the region in the 1960s and 1970s, but since the 1980s most of the continent swung back toward civilian rule. In most countries, however, the rural poor face a narrow range of political options, and lack the power to hold governments accountable.

Some of the governments were elected quite democratically, like in Brazil, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and now even Haiti, which just elected a radical priest as president. In contrast, in El Salvador and Guatemala the army remains all-powerful behind civilian facades. The political left is still excluded (though on-going negotiations might change this in El Salvador). The armed forces are also looming in the background in Colombia, Honduras, Argentina and Chile. In terms of election fraud, only in Mexico is it still a problem of national scope.

The picture is mixed, but the fact that in many Latin America countries elections are *not fully democratic* does not mean that they are *irrelevant* for peasant movements. Elections can create unpredictable opportunities for social mobilization and political change even if they are not democratic—like in the Philippines in 1986.

So far, what difference has this return to civilian rule meant to the peasants and farmworkers of Latin America? In Latin America, only Nicaragua experienced a major land reform in the 1980s. The only other countries where land reform was even on the political agenda were Brazil (where it was defeated politically) and El Salvador (where it was imposed from outside, as part of the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy). Hence, in the 1980s we have many "half-way" democracies in the region, but almost no agrarian reforms.¹ This failure to carry out land reform reflects the political *under-representation* of peasants along with the *over-representation* of landlords.

Why So Little Peasant Power?

One might think that if major Latin America countries have had more or less free elections, not too dirtied by fraud and repression, then political parties would want to appeal to peasant votes. After all, in close elections peasant votes can matter even in countries with urban majorities. Yet rural inequality increased in the 1980s in Latin America. Why?

On the most general level, no matter what the political system, the key issue is how much power those for and against land reform have. In most of Latin America, peasants are politically weak due to five major reasons (given here not in order of importance).

First, the largest Latin America countries are now largely urban. Peasants are not always the largest social group. Rural problems therefore do not translate easily into national issues.

Second, most countries have suffered major economic crises throughout the decade. This was one reason the ruling armed forces were willing to turn power back over to the civilians. Debt and capital flight have come before development, so there has not been much money for rural social programs, agricultural supports, or landlord compensation for land redistribution.

Patterns of Land Reform in Latin America

Third, most Latin American peasants, in spite of long histories of struggle, still lack their own powerful, consolidated organizations that can get people out into the streets and the voting booths. Continuing repression despite civilian rule is one factor here, but not the only one. Populist and even military governments are often able to coopt or divide peasant organizations without necessarily using force.

Fourth, largely because of the limited presence of autonomous peasant organizations, very few national political parties care about representing the rural poor, with the important exceptions of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Workers' Party in Brazil. The armed revolutionary movements of El Salvador and Guatemala are major actors, fighting for structural change to benefit the rural poor, but they are not mass political parties.

Fifth, traditional land reform policy ideas, whether reformist or revolutionary, were very state-interventionist. These approaches are no longer convincing to many sectors, since they are widely associated with economic inefficiency, corruption and political manipulation. The failures of the past thus constrain the possibilities for the future.

Because of the political weakness of peasants and farmworkers, the poor track record of Latin American land reform is not surprising. Most Latin America countries have made at least gestures toward land reform at some time or another, especially in the 1960s after the Cuban revolution. The U.S. government's "Alliance for Progress" program promoted top down centrist reforms to preempt the left. Only in Chile did these reforms lead to serious change, and they were later reversed by a U.S.-backed military coup.

Two key patterns stand out. First, unlike in most Asian "land to the tiller" reforms, most past Latin American land reforms stressed moving people to new lands, rather than giving them ownership of land they previously rented or sharecropped—as in the Philippines in the 1930s and 1950s. Sometimes large estates were simply turned into cooperatives or state farms, but most Latin American land reform beneficiaries were assigned to lands that they have not worked before, either lands taken from landlords or undeveloped lands at the agricultural frontier. The fact that the state chose the beneficiaries, often controlling how they could be organized, made the process especially prone to "divide and conquer" strategies of political manipulation.

Mobilization from below was the driving force behind the state decision to carry out reforms in many cases, but the state usually chose exactly how to respond—choosing policies that gave it increased power to control from above. The result was that peasant movements often appeared to win the battle for land reform, but over time they lost the war, so to speak, for long-term political empowerment. It turns out that it is just as important to have the power to hold the state accountable during the implementation process as it is to put agrarian reform on the agenda in the first place.

The second general pattern is that most Latin America land reforms had two *distinct kinds of goals*—political goals for the reform sector, and economic goals for the remaining capitalist sector. Most often, the goal of the reform sector is to create a *political clientele* for the government, dividing the rural poor between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Policies toward the non-

reform sector have more *economic* goals. Most of the land usually remains in the hands of large and medium-sized owners—they almost always have very high retention limits, and have the right to hold on to their best land. The reform laws and related agricultural support policies encourage them to increase capital intensity and become more efficient producers. The winners therefore include most landlords and a relatively well-off minority of the peasantry. All Latin American land reforms left out most of the landless « except for Cuba's, which turned wage workers into government employees, and possibly Nicaragua's.

To sum up the Latin American experience, one can put most of the region's land reforms into one of four general categories:

1. *State-dominated populist alliance.* These governments were not democratically elected, but mobilized/controlled organized peasant allies, rewarding them for their support (e.g., Mexico in the 1930s—trickling on into the 70s [50% of land], Peru in the 1970s [40% of land] were the most important). Relatively autonomous governments pre-empted potential future threats of unrest. Little autonomy or internal democracy was permitted in peasant organizations, which later tended to wither away or move into opposition, sometimes facing repression. These kinds of reforms may have been extensive in terms of the land affected, but they were basically top down, which meant that the peasants were later abandoned by the state.

2. *Agrarian revolution from above.* Revolutionaries came to power by force, with broad urban and peasant support. Land reforms primarily transferred land to the state farm sector, rather than to individuals or cooperatives (Cuba, Nicaragua until 1985). In Cuba, medium and large producers were all expropriated, while in Nicaragua the "mixed economy" policy affected only unproductive landlords, with medium-sized farmers remaining major actors. In both cases, small farmers were encouraged by economic incentives and political exhortation to join state-sponsored cooperatives.

3. *Response to armed peasant challenge.* Land was distributed to individual landless or semi-proletarian peasants to woo them away from armed threats to the state (U.S.-sponsored counter-revolutionary reform in El Salvador, Nicaragua's post-1985 shift to mass individual titling to win over the counter-revolution's social base).

4. *Electoral competition-driven reform.* As electoral systems opened up, urban-based center and leftist political parties reached out and competed for clientele among the rural poor (Chile under the Christian Democrats, 1964-70; Bolivia, post-1952). Some peasant organizations gained political autonomy, in spite of the political party tendencies to use them. Peasant mobilization sometimes outran the government's capacity to respond (Chile under Allende's Popular Unity government, 1970-73).

Looking at these land reforms, it seems that they had very little to do with lasting peasant empowerment, with the exception of Nicaragua. All were carried out by the state or they were not carried out at all. Not one Latin America land reform was *led* by autonomous, democratic peasant organizations—which I would argue is a necessary condition for any reform to benefit the majority in the long run.²

Rural Social Movements and Electoral Change

In the context of this history of top-down agrarian reforms, what are the prospects for increasing peasant empowerment in Latin America? Perhaps the most important trend is the changing relationship between social movements and electoral politics.

Rural electoral politics have been sharply biased in favor of elites in Latin America. Elite political machines remain very resilient in much of rural Latin America not only because they continue to control patronage and to influence the way poor people think, but also because they are often backed up by threats of violence and retribution.

These kinds of obstacles are not new, and they have often provoked major splits within peasant movements and progressive political parties over whether to participate in elections at all. Since the end of the last round of especially brutal military dictatorships, however, the vast majority of progressive forces have concluded that some political space is better than none, and that it is important to occupy the space available with the goal of enlarging it over the long term. Ten or 20 years ago, the issue was reform or revolution, but today, the choice is radical reform or more of the same.

Even in El Salvador, where the armed left is strongest, it no longer sees social revolution as on the agenda. Their main goal now is *real* political democracy.³ The revolutionaries are at a stage of military stalemate with the armed forces, and are actively pursuing a United Nations-sponsored negotiated settlement to be able to enter civilian politics under free and fair conditions. Today the FMLN position is that the *demilitarization* of the society would *in itself* be a revolutionary advance, and would be a sufficient condition to join civilian politics.⁴

In the context of this broader political shift in favor of working to turn flawed civilian government into genuine democracies, rural movements are developing creative new approaches to integrating their socioeconomic and political goals. Peasant movements are trying to make electoral politics more democratic without compromising their commitment to mass direct action and losing their autonomy to old or new political elites. Just how to do this is a "cutting edge" issue throughout the region, but especially in Mexico and Brazil, Latin America's two largest countries.

Changing Trends in Peasant Politics: Mexico and Brazil

Mexico and Brazil together make up 55% of Latin America's population. Both are quite industrialized nations, but approximately one-third of their populations remains on the land. Both now have large agribusiness lobbies, that have enjoyed years of government subsidies and protection. Rural elites dominate many regions, and remain willing and able to use violence against democratic movements.

Mexico

For rural people, the main difference between the two countries is that the Mexican state was built from the ashes of the 1900s agrarian revolutions, while Brazil's peasants have never been able to seriously challenge the ruling alliance of government and private oligarchies. The Mexican government's official mythology is that Zapata and Villa were the heroes of the revolution, but in fact they were both militarily defeated and eventually assassinated by rising new bureaucratic and business elites. The revolutionary demand of "Land and

Freedom" was still partly won, since the Mexican state later carried out a major land reform. The populist leadership in the 1930s mobilized but controlled peasants, laying the foundations for long-term political stability and industrial growth.

The Mexican government moved away from its peasant base after 1940. Since then, rural politics has been based on the "politics of promises." The state continued to title small amounts until the 1980s, to cool off certain hotspots and as occasional rewards for the obedient.⁵

Currently, the peasant movement is too weak to push land reform forward to benefit the approximately three million landless, but it has managed to keep much of the existing reform sector intact, at least on paper, including two million families and almost half of the arable land in the country. Perhaps the key issue today is to make the reform sector more viable, politically and economically, by moving away from paternalistic government controls and building up democratic peasant unions.⁶

The state simultaneously represses radical peasant organizations and makes political concessions, sometimes even supporting regional peasant organizations' self-managed economic development projects. This mixed response is due, in part, to conflict within the government. Even though Mexico has an authoritarian regime, because of its past revolutionary heritage there are some reformists inside it who try to make concessions to peasant movements.⁷

For a long time rural elections did not matter much because elections in general did not matter much. Mexico's ruling party used them as a show, since opposition parties were either weak or banned. But years of economic crisis undermined the old system of populist payoffs, and both right and left opposition grew in the 1980s, especially in urban areas. The main challenger was the son of the radical populist president from the 1930s. He broke with the ruling party, uniting both centrist and leftist nationalist forces in a mass mobilization that some compared to 1986 in the Philippines.

The 1988 elections were the first to seriously challenge the ruling party since the revolution, and the official candidate clearly lost in the big cities. The government was able to compensate with fraud in the more remote rural districts, however. This so-called "green-vote" was concentrated in areas populated by repressed ethnic minorities.

Both left and right-wing opposition political parties have been largely unable to reach out and tap the widespread dissatisfaction among the rural poor. Violent local bosses and strict controls on the media are key obstacles, but the vertical style of many party organizers is also a problem. Except for a few regions, the key rural opposition forces are socioeconomically-oriented peasant organizations rather than political parties. They have emerged largely from within the agrarian reform sector, and have campaigned for greater peasant control over the government's top-down rural development programs, higher crop prices and greater access to inputs, marketing, and processing. The key actor in this process has been the UNORCA network—the National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations.

The UNORCA was much more willing to mobilize than the government-

controlled groups, but also much more willing to negotiate than the traditional agrarian militants, who remain weak. The new network pushed for “winnable” demands, combining mass mobilization with pragmatic bargaining and concrete policy alternatives. UNORCA has tried to avoid the past pattern of party-controlled pyramidal structures, and instead emphasizes building a loose, more horizontal network which includes a wide range of political affiliations, *both* opposition *and* those aligned with the handful of peasant advocates remaining within the government. UNORCA members have gained control over key regional economic development projects, and some groups have gotten involved in electoral politics. Several activists have been elected mayors—with some remaining loyal to their bases while others put their own careers first. Remarkably, the UNORCA has held together and remained pluralistic, in spite of the strain caused by continuing repression and election fraud.

Brazil

In Brazil, in contrast, peasant movements were historically weak until the early 1960s, when a populist government encouraged peasant leagues to push for land reform. Their efforts were cut short by a military coup in 1964. A small attempt to form a rural-based guerrilla movement never took root, and was defeated both politically and militarily. The armed forces then attempted to contain possible future unrest by creating a top-down rural union structure, to provide welfare benefits rather than to represent peasant and farmworker interests. With the growing pressure for a return to democracy in the 1970s, the official rural union structure was shaken up by increased dissent, and by the time the first civilian president was appointed in 1984 agrarian reform was finally on the national agenda.⁸

In many rural districts of Brazil, landlords and ranchers still have small private armies but face no armed opposition, leading to over 1,000 deaths since 1980, according to Amnesty International. Some regions of Brazil have taken important steps toward democracy, however, thanks to the organizing efforts of the progressive Catholic Church, rural unionists and the Workers' Party. To give a little background, the Brazilian church is one of the most progressive in Latin America, and played a key role in sheltering social movements during the dictatorship. Many of these movements later formed the Workers' Party, which is very unusual because the party emerged *from* the movements rather than organizing the movements from above, or outside. As a result, this party is much more internally democratic and respectful of the autonomy of social movements than most left-wing parties in Latin America.

One of the most important areas of progress in rural Brazil is the small state of Acre, in the amazon jungle, where forest dwellers have organized democratic unions to fight the ranchers who want to burn down the forest. Dwellers live off sustainable agriculture, mainly collecting nuts and tapping rubber, so they have organized mass movements to stop the ranchers, using direct action, alliances with environmentalists and tribal people, and elections. Through direct actions known as “empates” or stand-offs, they managed to save huge amounts of forests from burning, and with the help of their environmentalist allies they have slowed down road-building and founded special forest reserves, in what they call an “agrarian reform for the forest.”⁹

One of the rubber-tappers' allies, a union advisor on the Workers' Party ticket, made it into the run-off election for the governorship last fall, defeating the most pro-rancher candidate. State politics are especially important, since

a few liberal and progressive governors have been able to carry out some local redistribution in spite of the defeat of the land reform project at the national level.

The rural poor have also made progress in the far southern regions of Brazil, where major mass movements have grown and consolidated, including small farmers fighting for better prices and agricultural supports, landless farmers mobilizing for agrarian reform, people to be displaced by planned hydroelectric dams, and rural women organizing for recognition, autonomy and power in each of the other movements. These movements are each distinct, but overlap somewhat as well, and they are trying to build broader unity while respecting one another's diversity.¹⁰ In alliance with the Workers' Party, they have begun to elect mayors and congresspeople.

In spite of progress in some regions, however, the lack of effective majority rule in much of the Brazilian countryside means that most rural districts elect pro-landlord congresspeople, giving rural elites significant national as well as regional clout. After high hopes were raised by the new civilian government's first land reform plan in 1985, mass mobilization by large farmers and ranchers convinced congress and the president to back off, and very little was actually implemented.

This almost changed in 1989, when the Worker's Party candidate, Lula, almost won the first direct elections for president since 1960. The election was held in two rounds. He placed second in the first round, with 16%. He lost the second round by only five percentage points, 43% to 38% adding up to about 85% turnout. Lula was the only candidate in favor of genuine land reform, and the Worker's Party remains a major player in national politics even though they lost the presidency. Few people were paying attention internationally, because of the changes in Eastern Europe, but Brazil's return to democracy affected just about as many people.

Key Trends from Mexico and Brazil

In both Mexico and Brazil, peasants are on the defensive nationally, but have been able to make progress regionally—combining self-managed socio-economic projects with small but significant electoral victories.¹¹ Radical peasant movements that have begun to turn to electoral politics do not expect politicians to be their saviors. On the contrary, precisely because most politicians are opportunists, peasant movements are looking for the best combination of *political strategies to punish their enemies and to reward their allies*. Occupying politicians' offices may be necessary but it is rarely enough—threatening to throw them out of office at the next election gives them added clout. Three related trends, in terms of the changing relationship between electoral and non-electoral politics, include:

1. *Tactical flexibility over ideological rigidity.* Repression and fraud have traditionally tended to polarize debates over political strategy into an electoral versus non-electoral dichotomy. This divided moderates from radicals, even though they shared many common goals. The new trend is toward the flexible combination of different arenas of action, emphasizing mass mobilization around socioeconomic demands at some times, and electoral politics at other times, in an effort to use progress in one arena to push ahead in the other.

2. *Building a democratic electoral alternative is slow.* The second trend is that

rural democratic activists have increasingly recognized that translating socio-economic movements into electoral alternatives is not easy or automatic. Participation in mass actions does not translate automatically into votes. Convincing movement sympathizers that an electoral alternative is truly viable is a major challenge, especially under less than democratic conditions. Local and regional elections have become a key arena of change because that is where victories are more winnable—among other reasons because the closer the elections are to the grassroots, the easier it is for the social movements to defend the ballot box and to hold elected officials accountable.

3. *Peasant unity above party or NGO divisions.* The third trend is toward increased pluralism and tolerance within movements for rural democratization. Where the key actors are grassroots peasant organizations, the chances are greater that involvement in electoral politics will put broader peasant goals ahead of particular party, NGO or ideological agendas. Sustaining pluralistic coalition-building depends, then, on social movement autonomy from political parties.

These trends have yet to grow to a point where they can push for a pro-peasant shift in the national balance of political forces, but in most Latin American countries they are the *only* trends pointing in that direction.

In this context—where the cutting edge of social and political change involves the consolidation of autonomous and democratic regional organizations—what are the key challenges for the future? First, how can the rural poor build and sustain broader political alliances, but on their own terms? Second, how can the rural poor keep their own organizations democratic and autonomous?

Alliance-building

The key challenge for alliance-building is to be able to propose political strategies and policy alternatives which unite possible allies while dividing potential enemies. Within the rural sector, perhaps the issue of land reform politics is which way the smallholder will go—with the landless or with the medium and large producers? This means integrating the *agrarian* struggle, around land tenure, with *agricultural* issues of production. Separating these two issues can lead to political disaster.

For example, the Brazilian land reform movement lost its best chance in 1985-86 in part because the right wing won the political battle for the “hearts and minds” of the small farmers. The large landlords were able to define who was a “producer,” and the Workers’ Party and its union allies have yet to catch up and project an attractive new democratic small farmer production alternative. Several key peasant movement strategists were actually quite worried about what would have happened if they had actually won the 1989 presidential elections—the lack of a combined agrarian/agricultural policy could well have led to disastrous collapse of production just as the government would have tried to make food much more available to the poor. And economic alternatives are not enough—rural majority-building requires taking into account the diversity of rural interests, fully including long-ignored ethnic and gender concerns.

Another alliance-building challenge is how to fully integrate the rural poor into national alternative politics. The mass media are key here, since they

project most of the images of what works and what does not. Peasant movements that want to win over urban allies need to show something that works, and this highlights the earlier point about the role of local and regional successes, whether involving the democratization of municipal or state governments, or showing the economic viability of peasant-managed development projects. The challenge is not just to convince the skeptical middle forces that the current situation is unjust, but also to show that the alternative can do a better job—not just for its own partisan supporters, but for the citizenry as a whole.

Organizational Democracy

Democracy is not only especially difficult for governments to establish—it is a challenge for peasant organizations as well.¹² Leaders often “take off” from the rank and file in all kinds of organizations. Peasant organizations often manage to sustain internal democracy at the local community level, but mass participation in decision-making and leadership accountability are more difficult as one looks at larger and larger organizations in Latin America.¹³

Regional organizations are crucial because they have the potential to combine the clout of a larger group with the responsiveness of smaller associations. Small local-level groups are easily isolated by their enemies, while national peasant organizations are usually democratic only insofar as they are made up of representative and participatory regional building blocks.

We should recognize, however, that regional peasant organizations face inherent contradictions in terms of internal democracy. Peasant movements must concentrate power regionally in order to become effective counterweights to regional elites. Yet to remain internally democratic and to reduce vulnerability to external intervention, regional organizations must decentralize power internally as well. These twin challenges therefore pose a dilemma: *how can a grassroots organization both centralize and decentralize power at the same time?*

In groups that are too large to be run by village-level direct democracy alone, often only the central leadership connects the many dispersed and diverse member communities. *Horizontal* linkages across communities are therefore especially important to counterbalance tendencies towards centralization of power.

Conclusion

To sum up some of the lessons from the Latin American experience, peasants have sometimes won in the short run but almost always lost out in the long run. Most agrarian reform, both reformist and revolutionary, were carried out by states in alliance with peasant organizations. But these alliances and the reforms they produced left little room for autonomous, democratic peasant organizations to defend the interests of the rural poor in the long run. In the past, national vertically-structured organizations often represented the state to the peasants, more than representing the peasants to the state.

Today, peasant movements throughout most of Latin America are on the defensive. They cannot set the national political agenda. But a new generation of peasant organizations is emerging, shifting the balance of power in the regions where they are strongest. They are finding new ways to integrate socioeconomic projects with political change at the regional level, trying to

sustain both internal democracy and autonomy from national political parties, even friendly ones. It would certainly help if allied political forces were somehow to win a national election, but rural democratization cannot be decreed from above. The driving force behind rural democratization is the gradual accumulation of political power by representative peasant organizations themselves. □

Notes

[1] There is talk of it in the new climate of political freedom in Paraguay, in response to waves of land invasions, but no action so far. See Brain Turner, "Paraguay's Peasants Test New Political Space," *Nicaraguan Perspectives* 19. [2] For related works on land reform and peasant politics from the 1980s, see among others: Donald Attwood and B.S. Baviskar, *Who Shares? Cooperatives and Rural Development* (Dehli: Oxford, 1988); Forrest Colburn ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1990); Bruce Cumings, "Interest and Ideology in the Study of Agrarian Politics," *Politics and Society* 10; Alain de Janvry, *The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1981); M. Riad El-Ghonemy, *The Political Economy of Rural Poverty, The Case for Land Reform* (London: Routledge, 1990); Milton Esman and Norman Uphoff, *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1984); Jonathan Fox, ed., *The Challenge of Rural Democratization, Perspectives from Latin America and the Philippines* (London: Frank Cass, Ltd., 1990) [also published as *Journal of Development Studies* 26 (July 1990)]; Merilee Grindle, *State and Countryside, Development Policy and Agrarian Politics in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986); John Harris and Mick Moore, eds., *Development and the Rural-Urban Divide* (London: Frank Cass, 1984) [also published as *Journal of Development Studies* 20]; Ron Herring, *Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia* (New Haven: Yale, 1983); Donald Leonard, and Dale R. Marshall, eds., *Institutions of Rural Development for the Poor* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982); Roy Prosterman and Jeffrey Reidinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987); Roy Prosterman, Mary Temple, and Timothy Hanstad, eds., *Agrarian Reform and Grassroots Development, Ten Case Studies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990); James Scott and Benjamin Kervliet, eds., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 1986) [also published as *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13]; Judith Tandler, *What To Think About Cooperatives: A Guide from Bolivia* (Rosslyn, VA: Inter-American Foundation, 1983); William Thiesenhusen, ed., *Searching for Agrarian Reform in Latin America* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Robert Weller and Scott Guggenheim, eds., *Power and Protest in the Countryside* (Durham: Duke Press, 1982). [3] A similar negotiation process recently unfolded in Colombia. Most of the armed left has joined the political system winning high levels of support in recent elections for a Constitutional Assembly. How far they will be able to go is still very uncertain, since the negotiations were carried out in spite of opposition from the armed forces. [4] As part of the current negotiations, the FLMN position is that a peaceful, fair and full implementation of the 1980 agrarian reform law would also be a revolutionary advance. [5] Government repression provoked the emergence of a small guerrilla movement in the late 1960s, but it was crushed within a few years. The government offered "carrots" as well as "sticks" and revived rural reform efforts. [6] For a case study of the rise and fall of participation within a representative Mexican union of ejidos (agrarian reform communities), see Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernandez, "Offsetting the Iron Law of Oligarchy, The Ebb and Flow of Leadership Accountability in a Regional Peasant Organization," *Grassroots Development* 13. For a more general overview of the Mexican peasant movement, see Jonathan Fox and Gustavo Gordillo, "Between State and Market: The Campesinos' Quest for Autonomy," in Wayne Cornelius, Judith Gentleman and Peter Smith, eds., *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* (La Jolla: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1989). See also Luisa Pare, "The Challenge of Rural Democratization in Mexico," *Journal of Development Studies* 26. [7] Sometimes they can become important allies for organizations challenging entrenched regional elites, but they are too weak to affect the national political scene. For analysis of a rural development program which created an important and unexpected political opening for the self-organization of the rural poor, see Jonathan Fox, "Popular Participation and Access to Food: Mexico's Community Food Councils," in Scott Whiteford and Anne Ferguson, eds., *Harvest of Want: Struggles for Food Security in Central America and Mexico* (Boulder: Westview, 1991, forthcoming). [8] Relatively little information is available in English on rural social movements in Brazil. For a comprehensive overview, see Candido Grybowski, "Rural Workers and Democratization in Brazil," *Journal of Development Studies* 26. [9] Rubber-tapper union leader and Workers' Party activist Chico Mendes gained world-wide attention for his efforts to build alliances between environmentalists and the peoples of the forest. He was assassinated two years ago, but the movement continues to grow and consolidate. See Chico Mendes in his own words, *Fight for the Forest* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1989). [10] Each has won some key victories, including the landless, who have