

# The Revolutionary Potential of Peasants in Latin America

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The whole issue of escalation of peasant demands as a reaction to landlord intransigence clearly demonstrates that peasants are not revolutionaries by birth, but neither are they the passive victims of traditional or modern forms of patronage. They let themselves be repressed, exploited and utilized, but the frustration which results brings an increasing awareness that other ways are open to them. In the present chapter, an effort will be made to show that the culture of repression in Latin America seems to become increasingly felt by the peasants as illegitimate and out of harmony with other possibilities that modernizing societies seem to offer. Peasants have had a variety of experiences which have promoted their awareness of possibilities for change. In some cases, peasant groups that have tried to overcome the effects of acute frustrations were halted in their spread or repressed (in the Convención valley in Peru and the Northeast of Brazil). It seems that in such cases, conditions for more radical movements are being created. Elsewhere, movements growing from below gained sufficient "power capability" to achieve important benefits and an institutionalized role on the national political scene. This happened in Mexico and Bolivia (after 1952), but particularly in Mexico, the influence of the organized peasantry was later neutralized by cooptation and integration in a dependent political patronage system. Only in Cuba, it seems that the peasantry has achieved or been given an active share in the national development effort and its benefits. In some countries, more or less populist or reform-oriented governments have at times made their appearance and have contributed to an awakening of the peasants. The latter were allowed or even stimulated to organize from above, as happened in Venezuela, Guatemala (before 1954) and Brazil (1963-1964), but as soon as the possibility for effective change grew, these populist governments were overthrown by conservative forces. This was possible because there was no strongly organized peasantry to defend the government, as happened at times in Mexico, Bolivia and Cuba. The period of repression that followed in these cases seems, however, to be a main condition for a radicalization of the peasants who will probably come into action at a later stage more strongly than ever (as occurred in Venezuela in 1958 after the repressive military government was overthrown). The various ways in which the peasantry of Latin America experiences frustration may well make them increasingly willing to participate in radical or revolutionary movements as happened in some past cases. Whether this revolutionary potential will be utilized depends on the extent to which urban allies will be prepared to support and guide such movements effectively.

## The Culture of Repression and Illegitimacy

At present, even the peasants in remote areas get an idea of political forces at the national level through the modern means of mass communication. This factor counted little in the past, when only such events as the Chaco War (Bolivia, 1933-1936), or la Violencia (Colombia, 1948-1958) shook up the peasant society sufficiently to create awareness regarding national political forces and conflicts. In areas where repression has been severe and where not only the local government and police, but also the national government through the army has taken a position against the peasants, awareness sometimes takes the form of resentment, if not hatred. Precisely in countries such as El Salvador, where repression has been extremely severe (the genocide of between 20,000 and 30,000 people in the early thirties) a constant semimilitary control over the rural areas has to be maintained in order to prevent the hatred from becoming overt aggression.

Also in areas where repression is less acute and obvious, the more subtle forms of the culture of repression are increasingly felt as such. Peasants learn about elections and popular participation, but serious doubts and distrust remain. In this respect, it seems important to take into account an observation by Charles Anderson.

A frequent point of departure for analysis of Latin American politics is to note that in this region (there is imperfect consensus on the nature of the political regime, that the legitimacy of the formal political order is weak).<sup>1</sup>

Most regimes seem to be distrusted because they are repressive. Horowitz defined:

... legitimacy is the perception of the State as a service agency rather than an oppressive mechanism, and ... this perception is cemented by a common adhesion to either legality or mass mobilization. The norm of illegitimacy, on the contrary, is the perception of the State as primarily a power agency, which is cemented by a common reliance on illegal means to rotate either the holders of power or the rules under which power is exercised.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly when a regime, felt as repressive and thus illegitimate, breaks down, the peasants easily seem to take the law into their own hands and give up their on the whole, overly legalistic attitude. Once the lid is off, the peasants defend their interests by means uncontrollable even by their own organization leaders.

This happened to a large extent in Bolivia after the years of repression during 1946-52 and in Venezuela to some extent after 1958, when the repression climate suddenly disappeared for reasons which were not directly influenced by the peasants. In such cases, among the peasants who felt repression most acutely,

those who had in earlier periods enjoyed some improvement or had justified expectations were the first to take action (not those who had always been repressed in a more or less constant way under the traditional system). The relatively more prosperous and developing areas of Cochabamba in Bolivia and the states of Aragua and Carabobo in Venezuela became the scenes of spontaneous radical peasant action.<sup>3</sup>

From the several cases studied, one could indicate three forms of frustration or repression which have led to radical peasant movements.

1. One is the intervention of the landlords which provokes the acute deterioration of a traditionally existing situation. The violent extension of sugar plantations at the cost of the traditional indigenous *comunidades* in the state of Morelos in Mexico in the later part of the last century is one example.
2. The second is the introduction of possibilities for considerable improvement, while for the majority of the peasants, the situation remains the same, worsens or improves very little. This was the case with the introduction of huge irrigation schemes in the northwestern development area of Mexico that benefited only the agricultural entrepreneurs and not the landless peasants who had legal claims to irrigated lands.
3. The third possibility is the achievement of improvements by the peasants in their economic or social conditions which suddenly become abruptly blocked and reversed. This was the case in the Convención valley in Peru, in the Galileia estate in the Northeast of Brazil, in some coffee-growing areas of Colombia such as Viotá, in Ucureña where the first Bolivian peasant syndicate was founded, and the densely populated areas of Venezuela before and during the Pérez Jiménez regime.

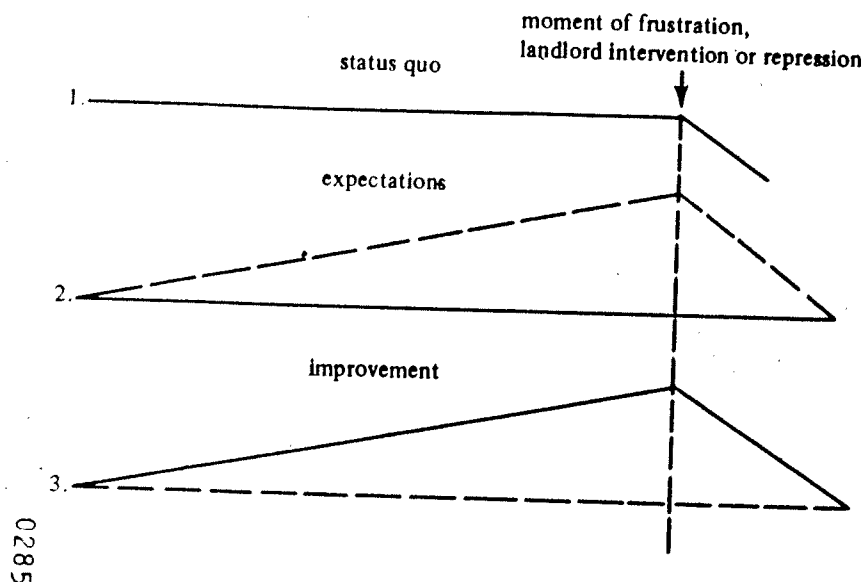
These three possibilities are shown graphically in Figure 7-1:

The success, or failure, of such radical movements at the national political level depends on several factors that will be dealt with briefly. Some of these movements were so limited in their impact that they could be considered as unsuccessful as a national political force (They grew as a protest against frustration but did not have enough impact to provoke changes in the overall political system because of repression or other limiting factors.)

The peasant federation in the Convención valley in Peru was neutralized partly by ceding to its demands and partly by severe measures of repression. The purpose of the movement, to bring about radical change at the national level, was not achieved. This may be because the most spectacular show of power

<sup>3</sup>This seems to be in conformity with the observations of de Tocqueville regarding the French revolution; he indicated that peasant movements were strongest in the areas that had undergone improvements but where discontent was strong as a result of frustrated expectations and relative deprivation.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 7-1  
Ways in Which Peasant Frustration Occurs



capability, the climax of a systematic campaign to escalate peasant action, came at a moment when the peasantry in other areas of the country was not yet prepared to take over and spread the movement. The action in the Convención area was premature and could be limited by government action (a localized land reform and military intervention).<sup>4</sup> The land reform agency, Oficina Nacional de Reforma Agraria (ONRA) immediately tried to transform the highly participatory following of Blanco into a clientele dependent on the flow of government benefits. Coffee growers cooperatives were organized and an effort was made to stimulate cooperative leadership which was not identical with the leadership of the militant unions, a large part of which was imprisoned. This government effort was only moderately successful. Later, when new problems and grievances arose, for example, the drop in coffee prices which meant losses to the peasant cooperatives, the old militant leaders were able to reestablish considerable influence. Protest demonstrations and mass meetings were organized about this issue in the capital of the valley, Quillabamba. One of the demands was to free Hugo Blanco from jail.<sup>5</sup>

The growing bargaining power of the Ligas Camponesas in the northeast of Brazil provoked the neutralizing efforts by more establishment oriented unions

created by the Church and later by the populist government. When these unions, partly under influence of the activities of leaders or former leaders of the Ligas, became more and more radical, the whole system of new organizations was destroyed after a *coup d'état* in 1964. Only a skeleton of the former unions and federations was left, which did not even serve as a dependent patronage system to the peasants.<sup>6</sup>

#### Neutralization or Mobilization: Mexico, Bolivia and Cuba

The effects of the more successful radical peasant movements were generally limited, in the end, after a new, middle-sector elite had established itself in power with peasant support. Anderson noted the following about this subject.

✓ *Summary:* New contenders are admitted to the political system when they fulfill two conditions in the eyes of existing power contenders. First, they must demonstrate possession of a power capability sufficient to pose a threat to existing contenders. Second, they must be perceived by other contenders as willing to abide by the rules of the game, to permit existing contenders to continue to exist and operate in the political system.<sup>7</sup>

Some peasant movements had sufficient power capability to be able to gain considerable influence at the national level. Some peasant organizations were enabled by reformist governments to demonstrate their power capability in an institutionalized way either because peasant support was needed by such a government to remain in power, or because the peasants had already, through their "political bargaining" methods, shown to have so much "power capability" that they could threaten the whole system, if they would not be satisfied. Mexico, particularly in the Cárdenas period (1934-1940), and Bolivia around 1953 were cases where peasants were allowed to organize and were provided with the means of power to protect themselves against the violence of the landowners.

In Mexico, where the *de facto* reform in most cases came years after the legal arrangements were worked out for the transfer of property, the landlords had every chance to boycott the legal procedure and at the same time use a great variety of violent means to halt the reform process. One effect of this was the death of many peasant leaders, among them outstanding regional leaders such as Primo Tapia. More recently, around 1958, only the formal threat by peasant organizations to take revenge prevented continued assassinations in the north-

<sup>6</sup>Peasants who participated in the cooperative training programs sponsored by the unions under guidance of the American Institute for Free Labor Development explained that they were well aware that this kind of activity was not what they needed, but they utilized the facilities as part of a preparation for "better days," when radical action would be possible again.<sup>6</sup>

western development area while the peasants were strongly campaigning for reform laws. During the Cárdenas regime, the situation was so hazardous that the government felt obliged to distribute 60,000 weapons among the organized peasants for their self-protection and as a guarantee that the legal procedures would be respected by the landowners. Legal provisions for the distribution of arms to the peasants had existed since 1926 when the white guards of the landlords were particularly active in frightening the peasants not to petition for land as the law stipulated. The armed peasants constituted according to the regulations a reserve army to guarantee internal order in the rural areas.

Provisions for the armed self-defense of peasants in countries where radical agrarian reforms encountered intransigent opposition from the traditional landowners not only turned out to be important for the implementation of the reform legislation as such. It was also a sign of the almost absolute confidence of the government in the peasants' loyalty. This gave the peasants considerable self-confidence and a chance to prove their loyalty by supporting the reformist government at a time when conservative forces tried to overthrow it. In Mexico, the peasantry came to the rescue of the reform-oriented government in 1923, 1929, 1935 and almost in 1940.

Now a crucial point is whether the peasant organizations with their armed force or with the freedom to show other forms of power capability are effectively mobilized and given ample participation (contributing as well as benefiting) in an overall development effort? Or are these peasant organizations neutralized and subjected to the support of middle-class interests, receiving only minor benefits and favors. It seems that in most cases where at some stage the peasantry has played an important role, their force was later neutralized more or less successfully through making the peasant organizations dependent on the distribution of benefits through a political patronage system that had been created essentially to serve classes other than the peasantry.

How new groups based on class solidarity can be neutralized and controlled by the overall system, strongly influenced by the traditional forces is also demonstrated by the Mexican case after 1940. During the Cardenas regime of the late thirties, a monolithic peasant organization was created out of several regionally organized groups to form part of the overall political structure. Several militant and strong groups were brought together in one organization, the Confederación Nacional Campesina, and thereby linked with the political system as a whole. After 1940, this structure was increasingly controlled by the middle sector, not identified with the peasants, but rather opposed to them. The bargaining power of the peasantry disappeared or was left unused. The main function of the official peasant organization, the CNC, was then to keep the peasants within the fold of the official party and mobilize support for the government at elections.

The relatively small middle sector, although larger than the traditional ruling class, reaps the benefits from modernization in Mexico, while the majority of the

population and particularly the peasants, fell back into conditions not too different from those before the Revolution. New forms of internal colonialism appeared. It should be noted that the reversal of the radical reformist policies after 1940 is partly (but only partly) a result of outside pressures, particularly from the USA which was interested in a politically stable Mexico in a period when fascist forces were becoming dangerously strong in their opposition to the radical experiments carried out during the Cárdenas regime.

In the overall post-1940 context, the CNC has lost its function as a promotor of a dynamic agrarian policy. Many of the CNC's regional or state leaders are politicians, often not of peasant origin, who function as brokers, or intermediaries between the government and the peasants and through whom individual peasants or groups can obtain favors or facilities in exchange for political support. Roads, schools, water supply or loans are used by officials to gain a political clientele at the local level. For many local leaders who know to adapt well to this system, it is advantageous to their personal social mobility. Since they conform, in order to be successful, to the standards set by the top leaders who identify with the middle-sector interests, these local leaders generally have little or no effectiveness in the long run as defenders of peasant interests. The overall system became so overpowering that the peasants were left in a state of dependency again. In many areas, the new political system of which the peasant organization was a part became so monopolistic and coercive that for the majority of the peasants the new situation became in some respects similar to the traditional hacienda system.

This is the main reason why considerable violence continues to prevail in the rural areas in Mexico and why at times radical movements occur which are repressed by army intervention. The assassination of the peasant leader Rubén Jaramillo in 1962, the massacre of peasants in Acapulco in 1967, the guerilla forces in the highlands of Chihuahua in Madera<sup>8</sup> and Guerrero (led by Genaro Vazquez), both still in operation, are symptoms of a potential for considerable unrest.

In Bolivia, some of the same forces were at work as in Mexico, but had less impact because of the shorter postrevolutionary period, and because the revolutionary change in the rural areas was considerably more profound and immediate than in most of Mexico.

During the carrying out in Bolivia of the peasant organization drive and the land distribution according to the law, there were few victims and violence was largely avoided. As we have seen, this was partly due to the fact that the peasants were effectively armed, so that they could defend themselves and those government functionaries who came to execute the laws in the few cases where landlords might have offered violent opposition. Special legislation was issued to regulate the rural security service in the hands of the peasants to guarantee a proper execution of the reform procedures. At present, the peasants in Bolivia still have a large part of their armed defense structure and have maintained the

possibility of using political bargaining power to a much larger extent than in Mexico.

In Bolivia, there is also a great deal more competition among the leadership, and the organization as a whole appears less monolithic than that of the Mexican CNC. The Bolivian Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CNTCB) is also less solidly controlled by a firmly established political party, dominated by middle-sector interests. It must be kept in mind that there has not yet been an opportunity in Bolivia for a new type of commercial farmers' class to arise whose interests conflict with the peasants' as in Mexico. This is largely because commercial-scale farming is virtually limited to the tropical lowlands where agrarian reform has been marginal to date. Particularly at the local level, peasant unions play a more important role in Bolivia than in Mexico, and there is probably more active participation of the rank and file in the management of local and regional affairs, although in this area, the degree of peasant participation still leaves much to be desired. While the peasant organizations increasingly assume the characteristics of a brokerage system, the flow of benefits is small, as are the available resources. They seem more and more to serve the purpose of merely maintaining clienteles of local or national leaders.

It should be noted that the peasant organization structure in Bolivia could possibly have been used to mobilize the peasantry behind a national development effort. Particularly after the radical land distribution, there was great enthusiasm among the peasants for new undertakings at all levels. It seems, however, that efforts were undertaken to calm and control this fervor rather than to channel it in effective ways. Many of the forces which try to prevent dynamic participation of the peasantry in the national economy could recover or remain in control.

This is particularly the case in the marketing system which remained in the hands of the townsmen who do not operate to the benefit of the peasants or of national development. International observers noted that the climate for effective community and regional development in Bolivia was exceptionally good compared with that of most other Andean countries because the institutional and psychological obstacles against full popular participation had disappeared.<sup>9</sup> But the new structure of peasant organizations was not sufficiently utilized. Instead, new and competitive organizations were created in which the townsmen had considerable influence.

The fact that the rank and file are often able to make their demands known through the use of political bargaining power is an indication that it would not be difficult to build on to the syndical structure. It seems that the Bolivian unions could still be used as a means of effective peasant mobilization for development and change rather than merely as a means of political manipulation of the peasantry.

Only one country, Cuba, as yet very little studied, has apparently been successful in giving the peasants a place in a new system which came about as a

result of revolutionary change. It also has mobilized the peasantry effectively in a new development venture. New institutions have been fashioned in such a way that they keep a spirit of movement for change and development alive among broad masses of the people.<sup>10</sup>

Before 1959, Cuba was already a country in which about 60 per cent of the population lived in urban areas and where bargaining organizations of workers had gained considerable strength. This was also the case among the sugarmill workers, but an estimated 500,000 farm laborers, including seasonal sugar cane workers, were practically unorganized and lived under minimal conditions. Also the sharecroppers, squatters and the 65,000 tenants who grew sugar cane had hardly any organization and lived at the margin of society as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Active participation in the forces which brought a new regime to power in 1959 came from the poor peasants in the mountain region of the Sierra Maestra. Many of these people were squatters who were continuously threatened by the large landowners and frequently evicted from the plots they tilled. It was in this area that already in 1958 a land reform program was carried out, giving secure title to the squatters. After the Revolution was victorious, a sense of participation in a new national venture was created among the whole peasantry. Through the agrarian reform law of May 1959, more than 100,000 tenants, sharecroppers and squatters became owners of their plot, without any obligation to pay for the land.<sup>12</sup> In addition to this land distribution, the agrarian reform program transformed the large-scale enterprises (many of which were owned by foreign companies) into collective or state farms.

After the reform, about one-third of those working in agriculture were small cultivators, working altogether 42 per cent of all farm land. In this important sector, new institutions were also created. More than 150,000 small farmers were organized into local associations and cooperatives, which in 1961 were brought together into the National Association of Small Cultivators (ANAP). This association acts as an intermediary in the supply of credit in the sale of products at fair prices. ANAP has been particularly effective in channelling cheap credits (with 4 per cent interest) to the small farmers in a system which gives over the supervisory task mainly to the local organization. Requests for credit are made to the bank through a local cooperative organization which guides, approves and supervises the cultivation plan of each member.<sup>13</sup> The available data do not indicate to which extent the planning of the local organizations is integrated into the national plan.

In addition to organizing the peasants' participation in credit and other agricultural promotion efforts, ANAP forms part of a wider system of popular mobilization through the so-called mass organizations. These are associations for farmers, workers, women, students and other categories covering the whole country with an estimated direct participation of one out of every two adult Cubans. (Before the Revolution of 1959, there was in Cuba, a high degree of solidarity among several categories of workers.)<sup>14</sup> A special place is taken among

the organizations by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comites de Defensa de la Revolución) which date from the period when the regime was threatened from various sides. They became multipurpose citizens' groups used by the national leadership for recruiting support as well as for promoting sanitation drives and other civic campaigns. Official reports claim that these committees have a membership of 1,500,000 persons, one out of every five Cubans, organized in a network of over 100,000 committees all over the country.<sup>15</sup> From the presently available information, it is difficult to assess whether the flow of influence from the people to the top in this system is as effective as the influence from the top downward.

In addition to the new institutions, the mass media are amply used to keep a spirit of participation in a national struggle alive among broad layers of the population. The mass media, since long extensively spread in Cuba, keep the people continuously informed about national problems and make an almost direct influence by the charismatic national leadership possible. Apparently, another important factor is the two-way flow between city and countryside, since as many urban people go to work temporarily in the rural areas as *vice versa*.<sup>16</sup> That the sweeping nature of the land reform in 1959 had a nation-moving impact which reached well into the urban areas can be concluded from a public opinion poll carried out within a year of the reform by a team of the Princeton University. Of a countrywide sample of urban Cubans, 86 per cent indicated at that time that they supported the new government, and agrarian reform was mentioned most often as the "best aspects of life in Cuba today," with honest government as a second item.<sup>17</sup>

It would be highly useful if up-to-date studies could be made of the mobilization of the peasantry and their participation in the national development effort in Cuba. It seems clear that the main impulse for mobilization came from above, after the revolutionary government had come to power. Unlike Mexico and Bolivia, the peasant protest movement from below, although crucial in the initial stages of the guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra, was not of such large proportions as to force the government to take the peasants into account once a new regime was established. However, the new government felt itself ideologically committed to a radical reform program and mobilized the peasants rather than neutralizing them as in Mexico and Bolivia. It possibly also felt the need for mass peasant support. It should be noted that the peasantry in Cuba was only one-third of the population as a whole and not the overwhelming majority it was in the days of revolution and turmoil in Mexico and Bolivia.

#### The Creation of Organizations from Above: Populism and Patronage

In the light of the later developments of peasant organizations in Mexico and/or Bolivia, it can be understood that other governments and parties have tried or

are trying to create peasant organizations which have considerable vertical ties to the overall political system from the outset. This means that the peasants can be rallied in ways which give them some political bargaining power in a controlled way, opposing or neutralizing the traditional landholding interests.

Such vertically stimulated peasant organizations received benefits for their members before they had sufficient bargaining power to get such benefits on their own account. Such organizations are as clienteles dependent on those who manipulate the benefits, while the followings growing from below gained benefits in an independent way. It has been noted that in the Latin American labor movement, the dependent organizations which are stimulated from above, are quite common.<sup>18</sup> The government often creates such organizations as a clientele that depends on a flow of benefits, in order to prevent the rise of independent organizations that may try to gain influence through the use of their own political bargaining power.

Several Latin American governments have at some stage tried to mobilize the peasantry in a controlled way. These are Venezuela, Brazil (before 1964) and Guatemala (before 1954). However, this mobilization was carried out less wholeheartedly than in Mexico, Bolivia or Cuba where peasants received arms to defend their interests and the regime that benefited them.<sup>19</sup> The governments of Venezuela, Brazil and Guatemala that promoted peasant mobilization could be considered populist. Such regimes maintain that there is unity among the people, rather than a division (and struggle) along class lines.<sup>19</sup> They try to content all classes and power contenders (in the terms of Anderson). Mexico and Bolivia can also be considered populist in this sense, particularly after a new equilibrium between different classes had been established.

Venezuela is apparently a case in point. The Federación Campesina de Venezuela (FCV) was, from its foundation, dependent on the flow of certain benefits from the government to the peasants. Once a strong organization existed, and particularly after this organization had suffered several years of frustration under a repressive regime, the FCV reacted in a way not unlike the first peasant movements in Mexico and Bolivia. It displayed considerable political bargaining power through effective land invasions. But once the most militant groups were contented through land distribution, the Federación Campesina de Venezuela became a brokerage system through which benefits flow to the peasant groups in exchange for their electoral support.

Only at one point did this system come close to running out of hand (during the invasions of 1958-1960) and this was as a reaction to the fact that the military dictatorship in power for ten years had come to repress even this well-controlled political patronage system. It is clear that one of the most important factors that keeps this system functioning in Venezuela with some degree of effec-

<sup>18</sup>One can only speculate what would have happened to reform-oriented governments in Venezuela (1948), Guatemala (1954) and Brazil (1964), and the agrarian reform program they were executing or initiating had there been a loyal and powerfully organized peasantry to support them against coups staged by the military forces.

tiveness is the availability of the considerable financial resources coming from oil revenues. Through these resources, the opposition of the landlords could be overcome in the first place and then the peasantry could be kept in expectation of benefits by a careful and strategic distribution of benefits in those areas where dissidence might develop. It should also be noted that Venezuela is different from most other Latin American countries in that its rural population represents only about one-third of the total.

In Brazil, a similar approach was tried in 1963-1964 when the government created a national system of peasant organizations in order to guarantee electoral support and to overshadow the peasant leagues and other militant peasant organizations that existed in some regions. However, through elections within the unions, the new structure came under control of their most radical elements, which was probably one of the reasons why the traditional elites and the army eliminated the whole political system in 1964.

A similar thing had happened ten years before in Guatemala in the counter-reform of 1954. However, the process of repression after a more or less controlled peasant mobilization had taken place led to an awakening of the peasants to their interests as a class similar to what happened as a result of the *violencia* in Colombia (and what could possibly happen in Brazil).

It is clear from the Guatemalan case, but particularly from the Venezuelan (1948-1958) and Bolivian (1946-1952) cases, that severe repression after a period of populist regime (which gave certain benefits and hopes to the peasantry) creates a climate favorable for radical peasant movements. Such movements then can only be contained by considerable concessions, if not overall reform or revolution favorable to the peasants. The conservative reaction of the traditional elites to the moderate reforms of the more or less populist regimes of Villaroel in Bolivia (1943-1946) and of Betancourt in Venezuela (1945-1948) created the conditions for the rise of radical peasant movements that came close to being revolutionary in 1952 and 1958, respectively.

In Guatemala, a similar development can at present be halted only by a considerable show of force and repression. As noted in Chapter 5, a great number of peasants and peasant leaders have been assassinated between 1962 and today and yet the unrest in the rural areas prevails. One could say that the intransigent reaction of the landed elite, repressing the peasant organizations or followings, even though these were stimulated from above by a reformist government brought a higher degree of class consciousness to the peasants. This consciousness could not have been brought about by the vertically created peasant organizations as such, dependent as they were on official patronage. For an organization living on a flow of benefits from government sources, it is difficult to maintain militancy as a class organization. As can be seen in Venezuela after 1960 and Mexico after 1940, such a dependent peasant organization can be manipulated so as not to harm middle-sector interests, even when these interests are not identical or even contrary to those of the peasants.

Some scholars have maintained the view that the force of vertical patronage ties is a reason why there is a lack of solidarity among peasants and little class-consciousness. Without going into a discussion of concepts introduced by Marx such as class-for-itself, class struggle, which may not apply in the same manner to the Latin American reality as they did to the European one during the first part of the last century, some correction should be given to this overly pessimistic view on the possibilities for the peasant struggle.<sup>20</sup>

If a proper distinction is made between various types of patronage, it can be seen that some forms have an important function in the creation of solidarity among peasants. Peasant solidarity is as little an inherent peasant characteristic as is resistance to change or distrust or the *encogido* syndrome. As was shown in earlier chapters, some counterpoint elements exist in the overall culture of repression, characteristic for the hacienda system in Latin America. These counterpoints reveal themselves in distrust and resistance, but they can be utilized and rallied for effective struggle. Solidarity and class-consciousness can emerge during the struggle and as an integral part of it. Efforts to prevent solidarity from growing, such as the use of vertical patronage influences, are factors in the struggle.

As we have seen, populist governments such as existed in Brazil before 1964 and Guatemala before 1954 may create vertically controlled peasant organizations, but the struggle in which these organizations unavoidably get involved once they defend peasant interests, brings to increasingly large sections of the peasantry a greater solidarity and class-consciousness. This is not a natural growth phenomenon, but a result of the intransigent reaction of those whose interests are opposed to the peasants. Except for countries where huge resources exist to maintain a brokerage system that is reasonably beneficial to the peasants while, at the same time, sufficient to content the landlords (as happened in Venezuela), the growth of peasant clienteles independent from the traditional hacienda clientele seems an important step in the creation of a class-conscious or even revolutionary peasantry. How the populist system will develop depends mainly, as it seems, on the willingness of the traditional elite to give in to legitimate demands and to conform to the need for radical change. If they resist the pressures from the peasants, as they mostly do, the peasants will radicalize and escalate their demands and tactics of struggle. The peaceful coexistence of various vertical clienteles within the populist system will then collapse. Repression of the peasants follows, but this makes clear to them where their basic interests lie, and chances that they will be controlled again by a vertical clientele system and without repression, appear small. Guatemala, where the peasantry was highly traditional and isolated, is a case in point. There are many indications that conditions for a mobilization of the indigenous peasants for a radical reformist or revolutionary action are better than ever. This is quite understandable after the developments described above. Particularly important is the fact that populist governments stimulate a high-level expectation, but are unable to realize the

promises because of the unwillingness and resistance of the traditional elite to adapt to new situations. Frustration, radicalization and repression leading to greater radicalization seem to be a recurrent theme in present Latin American peasant politics.

#### Other Factors Promoting the Revolutionary Potential

For those who see in revolutionary changes of the Latin American societies the only way to dynamic development, the present tendencies in the rural areas seem to offer good chances in the long run. As was noted

There exists an ideologically unfocused quasiinsurgency of peasant uprisings as one aspect of the violence that is an endemic feature of political life in many Latin American countries. Usually these have sought a remedy for a specific grievance or have been the attempt of land squatters to protect their claims against the government forces. This shades into rural banditry. Peasant-connected incidents of this type are not insurgency but can develop into it. Legitimate guerillas often utilize peasant unrest or incorporate rural bandits into their ranks.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically enough, this observation was made in the context of a top-level debate on foreign policy of the United States. It is well-known, and at times recognized, that this policy has tried to make impossible consistent populist reforms in several Latin American countries where United States interests were at stake. The counterreform in Guatemala in 1954 is the most renowned case. In several countries, such as Mexico (where during 1934-1940 many United States estates were expropriated) or Bolivia (where few United States landed interests existed), populist governments were left alone to carry out land reforms. Although the subject has hardly been studied systematically, there is some evidence that the United States favored the neutralization of the peasantry and the deemphasis on land reform during the post-1940 governments in Mexico, particularly during the term of president Miguel Aleman (1946-1952).<sup>22</sup> In Bolivia, USAID community development advisors were influential in neutralizing to some extent the peasant syndicate structure by creating parallel community councils for the promotion of community projects, rather than relying for this on the existing peasant unions. Only in Cuba, where United States influence, after it had tried to subvert or overthrow the revolutionary government, was completely cut off, could a consistent mobilization of the peasantry and their participation in a national development effort be achieved. United States policies have not always been consistent. While in the early sixties, the Declaration of Punta del Este emphasized the need for agrarian reform as a precondition for overall development in Latin America and for receiving United States aid, several

governments which allowed forces to develop that might be helpful in the promulgation or carrying out of effective land reform, such as the Goulart regime in Brazil in 1964, were overthrown with the tacit or active support of the United States.

United States aid to peasant organizations is generally channelled only to those movements that do not strongly emphasize the need for radical land reform. In some cases, however, such as Venezuela in the early sixties, land reform and peasant organization is strongly supported, because this helped to prevent "Castro's attempts at insurgency."<sup>23</sup>

The extent to which populist governments are liable to foreign pressures depends on the type of foreign interests involved, which varies from country to country. At the United States policy level, one increasingly hears voices that denounce the rigidly antireformist United States pressures of the last few years, particularly the various forms of military aid given to Latin American governments. However, the tendencies to defend stability at all costs rather than to allow significant reforms to occur, seem to continue. In the long run, this policy, emphasizing economic development without social reform, may enhance the revolutionary potential of the peasantry even more than the populist reform policies.<sup>24</sup>

It is not only the populist regimes that create instability and frustration among the peasantry. Almost any development policy has this effect since it upsets the status quo and often creates relative deprivation rather than improvement. A recent study on the chances for civil violence gave the following hypothesis.

The occurrence of civil violence presupposes the likelihood of relative deprivation among substantial numbers of individuals in a society; concomitantly, the more severe is relative deprivation, the greater are the likelihood and intensity of civil violence.<sup>25</sup>

Additional factors not directly related to the rural situation are summarized by Kling.

*Legal and formal concomitants of violence.* Not surprisingly, there are legal and formal corollaries of the patterns of violence in Latin America:

1. frequent replacement and revision of written constitutional documents;
2. conspicuous departures from prescribed constitutional norms in political behavior;
3. recurrent suspensions of constitutional guarantees, declarations of states of siege, and the conduct of government by decree; and
4. the institutionalization of procedures for exile, including the right of asylum.<sup>26</sup>

The Colombian land reform program, emphasizing technical improvements and infrastructure building, can be considered typical for the half-hearted development efforts that create frustration among the peasants. This program was



often propagandized as the example of the new Alliance for Progress reform strategy. The failure of this program to bring about any significant social reform has been recognized.<sup>27</sup> As a result continuous peasant unrest is a characteristic of Colombian rural life.<sup>28</sup>

As was noted in a recent evaluation of the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA), it "... had achieved a degree of success in its various activities (in agricultural improvement, irrigation facilities and infrastructure building among others) but has not, in the aggregate, achieved any appreciable success in effectively transforming the maldistribution of land in Colombia."<sup>29</sup> The fact that this approach in Colombia enhances the organizability of the peasants was recently noted in a technical study on the potential for insurgency in Latin American countries.<sup>30</sup>

Wherever new and modernizing influences enter into the rural areas, relative deprivation makes its appearance. This is often an unplanned result of a variety of development projects and programs, including irrigation schemes, settlement projects, and community development efforts. The traditional status quo is changed in such cases mostly in ways which give little participation to the peasantry. Frequently, the established elite or a privileged minority gets such a large share of the benefits that a development program loses its appeal and effect for the peasants. In addition, there are often the directly opposing traditional interests which detain any program that tends to lead to effective social change at the local level.

In the first chapters of this study, it was demonstrated that the commonly shown distrust of peasants regarding local development projects is not an irrational aspect of traditional peasant behavior, but rather the result of an awareness of the severe limitations of such projects which basically cover up unbearable conditions rather than bring improvement. Through effective involvement in three such projects, in rural areas in Central America, Sicily (where the situation has many similarities with Latin America) and Chile, I was able to learn gradually that this peasant distrust is quite rational and justified and that if properly utilized, it can be a condition for effective and militant peasant organization. (Distrust is a logical reaction of the peasant to the resistance to change of the landed elite.)

Ironically, it appears that it is precisely the landlord opposition and the resulting frustration among the peasants that is one of the main factors leading to the emergence of radical movements which cannot be contented unless really significant reforms have been brought about.

While the short-term effect of many community projects, such as the one in which I participated in El Salvador, seems to be increasing frustration, in the long run, such effort may have the positive effect of enhancing the organizability of the peasants. The more radical leaders of newly created organizations that appeal to the most basic and strongly felt needs of the peasantry, including the desire for basic structural reforms, will increasingly find response as was the case in the Punitaqui project in Chile that I assisted.

In the rural areas where some form of half-hearted change or development takes place, frustration and relative deprivation will grow and so will the chances for protest, civil disobedience, or even civil violence. This fact, occurring with increasing frequency in Latin American countries, conforms to a general trend: the more expectations are aroused and, relatively, frustrated, the more the apathy and tradition-bound conformity which dominated the rural areas for ages will make place for an aggressive attitude.

For this reason, the approach of those traditional groups that try to avoid any change at all in order to maintain their privileged position is understandable, but preventing change from taking place becomes more and more impossible in the Latin American countries these days. (Even in isolated regions, there are modernizing influences. Roads, school teachers, a transistor radio, villagers who have worked in urban areas or mines and return to their birthplace are all factors which are the beginning of the erosion of the status quo.) The state of violence is inherent in a society with a rigid social structure that divides the population into a few holders of power and a majority which has little or no share in economic benefits and political power. (The situation of the peasant becomes increasingly unbearable after modernizing changes occur. And, as was noted above, turning the clock back after certain changes favorable to the peasants have been made can be achieved by increasing repression, but seems to have a radicalizing effect in the long run.)

Whether the increasingly favorable climate for militant peasant movements will be utilized depends to a large extent on the willingness of urban allies to support and guide the peasant organizations. Since the forces that oppose representative peasant organizations, the traditional landed elite, are highly sophisticated and do not hesitate to use any possible means to block peasant pressures to emerge, it is logical that the peasants need allies of equal sophistication to help defend their legitimate interests. Practically all cases of known strong peasant movements have had such allies.

In this respect, it is important to note that an erosion of the status quo is also taking place within the traditional elite itself. There seems to be an increasing number of sons of the wealthier classes, including the landed elite, who rather than inheriting status and wealth from their forefathers want to build a career and serve their country in ways which refute their background. Some of them become advisors to popular pressure groups, others take even more risky and spectacular approaches and join movements of armed resistance against the established order. According to Vega, a good number of participants in guerrilla movements come from the circles of the traditional elite.<sup>32</sup> As a result of the latter, some of the most backward areas of Peru and Guatemala have been or are being opened up through military-civic action programs which entered those regions in order to eliminate foci of guerrillas which had chosen those areas for their operation. These forces of modernization appear to bring about the erosion of the status quo in areas where the impact of population increase, urban contacts, and natural erosion are not yet strongly felt. For revolutionary movements

of the past, similar phenomena have been noted. The loss of self-esteem among the ruling class as well as the transfer of allegiance of the intellectuals were important factors.<sup>33</sup> These forces are presently working with increasing strength in Latin America. (Fidel Castro, Francisco Juliao, and Hugo Blanco are examples of popular leaders who were, by birth, members of elite classes.) Part of the strategy for promoting peasant organization might be directed towards increasing the number of dissidents among the traditional elites. As we have seen, some of the younger members of the traditional elites seem to be willing and eager to accept new constructive roles in which they can find self-esteem and status and which are more in step with dynamic development needs of their countries than the traditional roles of their fathers. One could imagine that many young members of the traditional elite potentially feel that self-esteem derived from personal effort and capacity in the fulfillment of such new roles is more satisfactory than status derived from inheritance and the copying of outdated patterns of seignorial life. As yet, few systematic efforts have been made to tap the potentialities of disconformity and adventure of those youths.

It seems that the restlessness of youth and student groups in many countries is not unrelated to an attitude of protest against the traditional value system which upholds the overall status quo, most sharply visible in the rural areas.<sup>34</sup> A factor of great importance in this respect is that it becomes increasingly clear that (the most conservative and repressive governments in Latin America are supported in the name of stability by foreign influences, particularly the United States.) Especially in those countries where agrarian reform and peasant organization efforts or plans were frustrated, e.g., Guatemala in 1954 and Brazil in 1964, such outside interventions were more or less obvious, but they are increasingly recognized in most countries. In academic circles in Latin America,<sup>35</sup> criticism of United States intervention and economic domination has become a rallying point for protest action, but as yet, few links have been made between these intellectual protests and the actual or potential peasant resistance. The few guerrilla groups which have operated in some Latin American countries seem on the whole to have failed to make proper contact with the peasantry and convince them that their causes coincided. There is a considerable gap between the urban intellectuals, defected young members of the upper classes, and students on the one hand—and the distrustful peasantry on the other. One proof of this gap seems to be the expectation that once a group starts to organize a focus of revolutionary resistance to the overall system in some region, the peasantry will follow the call for revolt without much preparation and without going through several stages of conscientization and organization. The feasibility of collaboration between those urban political forces engaged in radical change and the peasantry and its leaders is demonstrated by the examples of this study.

Up to the present, few programs exist where university students were stimulated on a large scale to participate actively in rural organization efforts. However, where this has been done, some groups of young people of the educated

classes have responded enthusiastically and shown ability to establish relationships with the peasantry which differ from the traditional pattern. The *Promoción Popular Universitaria* in Peru and some university-sponsored rural promotion programs in Chile were interesting examples. The first was practically discontinued because of its renovating or even radicalizing impact, particularly among the students.

Another group that has drawn attention as a powerful potential ally of the peasants are the local priests who have been influenced by new social teachings currently becoming important. Several groups of priests, interested and actively engaged in work in this field, have been formed in Colombia and Peru. The fact that students as well as priests belong to a kind of patronage system (university and church, respectively) that can be made independent from the overall traditionally controlled patronage system could be an advantage. Altogether, it seems that a broad field for experimentation in peasant organization lies open.

How "revolutionary" future peasant movements will be seems to depend largely on the measure of intransigence of the traditional "elites" and the national and international forces that support them. Past experience suggests that the more resistant to change the Latin American "elites" will be, the more radical the demands and the means of struggle of the peasantry will become.