

and small farmers. This is clearly a handicap if the book intended to evaluate the so-called 'neo-liberal' agricultural policies of the last two decades.

However, this specific approach has some merits. It gives information about sectors that more standard macro-analyses tend to neglect. In particular, those chapters including survey findings are very valuable, especially the broad effort of Scott's study. His sample is very rich and I hope we will soon see further published results. Some of his findings are confirmed by Korovkin's study. Perhaps one of the outstanding conclusions is that discussions about problems of land tenure no longer seem to be *the* controversial issue. And this is not because the reforms implemented gave the desired results, but precisely for the opposite reason. Poor performances in rural areas do not depend only on whether or not small peasants have property rights to land plots. Sometimes this can be irrelevant (plots of poor quality land). This stresses the importance of mechanisms for accumulating working capital and technical/organisational skills under relative conditions of income stability. It is here that one finds the main problem; to leave aside discussions about property transfers seems to be correct, especially after the costly (politically and economically) experiences of the last three decades.

This still leaves open the debate about what type and which degree of intervention by regulatory and subsidiary policies the State should follow. There seems to be relative consensus on the areas to act upon (credit access, insurance-type mechanisms, skill-training devices, the problem of temporary jobs). The question is how and with what priority to do it. This book does not provide much guidance in this area.

Of course, this debate is related to the 'tension' that always exists between the objectives of favouring accumulation (growth) and improving wealth distribution. History demonstrates how important this problem is in Latin America. Chile is not an exception, even less after the developments of the last two decades. Some of the papers refer to this dilemma (Silva's and Diaz's). They rightly show some ideological bias. Ideology can sometimes be helpful for creating co-operative efforts. However, the use of ideology can be very harmful when it neglects pragmatic solutions or essential concessions to other positions. I fear some arguments in this book move in this direction. Recent Chilean history shows how destructive an over-ideological approach to collective rules of decision-making can be.

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Roberto Santana et al., *La question alimentaire en Amérique Latine: Mexique-Venezuela-Equateur-Pérou* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Collection 'Amérique Latine - Pays Ibériques' du Centre Régional de Publication de Toulouse, 1990), pp. 233, 110 F.

This book includes eight essays on food security issues – two on Peru, two on Ecuador, one on Venezuela and three on Mexico. They were written by geographers and economists of the Latin American Research Group (GRAL) at the University of Toulouse. There is also an Introduction by the book's co-ordinator, Roberto Santana, and a brief conclusion by Claude Bataillon calling for more research.

Santana explains in his introduction that there were three principal criteria guiding the selection of essays and their presentation. One was to bring out important national differences among four countries that share a common cultural heritage, many institutional and structural characteristics, similar modernisation processes and a high level of dependence on non-agricultural primary commodity exports. A second was to identify some of the principal mechanisms and agents affecting food production and distribution. The third was to highlight the differential and often contradictory impacts of food policies for different social groups nationally, regionally and locally. These countries had all become alarmingly dependent on imports of basic foods, all were rapidly urbanising, experiencing serious problems of poverty and undernutrition (especially in many rural areas) and a virtual stagnation in the domestic production of basic foods. In these respects, they resembled most other Latin American countries and particularly those depending on mineral exports. Insights about their food problems should have wider significance.

The only chapter that attempts systematically to examine interactions of local and national food systems is Santana's on food poverty and production in indigenous communities of the Ecuadorean Andes. Successive national governments under different ideological banners all pursued development policies highly prejudicial for Indian livelihoods and for their natural environment. His chapter is preceded by an informative account of food marketing networks and trends in the southern Ecuadorean province of Loja by Anne-Lise Pietri.

Two chapters on Peru emphasise the country's increasing reliance on subsidised food imports at the cost of adequate incentives for peasant food producers. Lima has nearly one third of Peru's total population and successive governments find it imperative to provide its residents with cheap food. Bernard Maris reminds us that small margins for intermediaries do not necessarily imply an efficient marketing system. André Dudzinski highlights Peru's economic crisis, urban bias and extensive rural poverty. These two chapters could have been usefully combined as they cover much of the same ground and rely mostly on available published data.

Jean Tulet describes recent rapid expansion of irrigated vegetable production by peasants in the high Andean valleys of Venezuela. They responded enthusiastically to new urban markets and development assistance, but they were soon confronted with market gluts and low prices. The government tried to help with marketing and storage centres, but these were costly and inappropriate. Without public intervention, however, there is little prospect of peasants solving their marketing problems.

Therry Linck has a critical essay on Mexico's cumbersome centralised agrarian bureaucracy, and another on the history of food provisioning for the capital city. He makes several pertinent observations but gives the impression of being somewhat confused about the underlying issues. His treatment of the state and its administration as relatively autonomous social actors in the first essay is belied by his historical material in the second. His concepts of centralisation and concentration are vague. Claude Bataillon and Louis Penabière have an entertaining and suggestive essay on changing food consumption patterns in the world's biggest metropolis. Those of us who knew Mexico in the 1950s can understand their nostalgic tone. They call for comprehensive research into the capital's food provisioning and distribution system. They seem to have been

unaware of the major study along these lines being carried out at the time by Dr Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantara and her team in co-operation with UNRISD at the Colegio de México.¹

The book makes a useful contribution to the growing literature on Latin American food problems. It is not a well-integrated analysis, however, but a collection of disparate papers – some much more informative and perceptive than others.

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Rachel Garst and Tom Barry, *Feeding the Crisis: U.S. Food Aid and Farm Policy in Central America* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. xii + 275.

Rachel Garst and Tom Barry have written an extraordinarily good book; it is certainly the definitive work on food aid to Central America. But it is much more than this, and deserves an audience much greater than experts on Central America and food aid. The book provides a clear and concise review of US legislation on food aid and farm policy; it summarises well the debate over food self-sufficiency versus ‘comparative advantage’ in agricultural trade policy for underdeveloped countries; it provides insights into the counter-insurgency strategy of the Reagan and Bush administrations in Central America; and this list far from exhausts the contributions.

As a project in political persuasion, the book achieves its purpose well. It is hard to imagine that any reader could finish it and still think that food aid is or has ever been motivated by noble purpose. At the same time, it is a study of sound scholarship, meticulously footnoted and drawing on all the relevant literature. If a flaw might be found in the book it is that the authors are rather too mild in their criticism of the orthodox macroeconomic adjustment programmes fostered by the IMF and the World Bank. In light of the considerable evidence that has accumulated, the authors would have been justified in doing a hatchet job on ‘free trade’ in grains and other basic foods. The monopolistic role of the developed countries in these markets, their protectionist policies, the use of trade in food as a political weapon, all render ‘free trade’ arguments little more than ideology. Particularly surprising in terms of the authors’ general point of view is the discussion of policy ‘reforms’ in Central America, that seems to accept somewhat uncritically the alleged advantages of so-called free markets (pp. 93–4).

This criticism, however, is secondary in the context of the excellence of the book. Several policy issues are treated especially well. The analysis of ‘food for work’ in the Central American countries shows clearly the weakness of such programmes either to provide food for those who need it or to foster productive employment. One of the most useful aspects of the book is the discussion of US trade policy, where the contrast between neoliberal rhetoric and the reality of a myriad interventions including subsidies points out the hypocrisy of pressing

¹ Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantara, ‘Patterns of Socio-economic and Political Interaction in the Food Systems of Mexico City’, in Gustavo Esteva and James Austin (eds.), *Mexican Food Policy in the 1980s* (Cornell, 1986).