

Department of Economics  
and  
Institute for Policy Analysis  
University of Toronto  
150 St. George Street  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1  
Canada

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**Agrarian Reform, Land Distribution, and Small-Farm Policy  
as Preventive of Humanitarian Emergencies**

by

R. Albert Berry

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Department of Economics  
University of Toronto

Author's e-mail: [berry2@chass.utoronto.ca](mailto:berry2@chass.utoronto.ca)  
On-line version: <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/ecipa/wpa.html>

## **Agrarian Reform<sup>1</sup>, Land Distribution, and Small-Farm Policy as Preventive of Humanitarian Emergencies**

### **1. Introduction**

Most humanitarian emergencies with mainly economic causes occur in quite poor countries. Most such emergencies involve land in some way. Famines are due to problems in the realm of production and distribution of food. Rural violence often revolves around land disputes and/or landlessness. And a bad distribution of land contributes to low incomes, poverty and maldistribution of income, all of which tend to go with poor infrastructure, poor health and educational services and other factors which make emergencies more likely than otherwise to occur. Accordingly it is arguable that the strongest preventive of a wide range of types of humanitarian emergencies is a good land distribution, or more precisely a system of land rights which provides broad access to the population, combined with policies strongly supportive of small-scale agriculture. When the initial land distribution differs markedly from the desired one, this will imply a need for agrarian reform. Ironically, though its potential for good is seldom tapped, those relatively few episodes where it has been applied have contributed positively to the welfare of tens of millions of people (perhaps hundreds of millions) of the most down-trodden people and made this type of reform one of the most welfare-increasing things that can happen in a country and one of the best forms of insurance against humanitarian emergencies.

Land distribution is of course only one of the many factors which affect the likelihood and severity of Complex Humanitarian Emergencies (CHEs), as well as other types of social crises. But it is a prominent factor. Inequality contributes to social tensions and land is in most societies by far the most important of the assets which a considerable share of families either have or aspire to having. Unequal access to land is often associated with and mutually reinforcing of ethnic differences, class differences and political cleavages. When the gap between those with much land and those with little corresponds to the difference between two ethnic groups and two classes, the recipe is in place for a very high level of dissatisfaction, jealousy, tension and, when the right

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<sup>1</sup> The term reform is used for a wide range of changes, including some which increase the concentration of land. Here the discussion is limited to cases in which an increase in the number of families with access to enough land to help them avoid poverty is at least a reasonably likely result, since otherwise it would not be expected to contribute to prevention of agriculture-related emergencies.

spark is there and the state is either too weak to control the violence or in the hands of one side in the confrontation, violence.

A healthy agrarian structure provides its emergency-preventing effects through several channels? First, by both raising the level of agricultural output (including especially that of food) and by improving the distribution of agricultural and overall income, a land reform decreases the level of poverty, (defined either in terms of absolute or relative income). Second, the wide access to land ownership and control which an egalitarian land system implies gives families more ways to smooth their incomes over the course of the year and thus reduces the frequency of seasonal food crises.<sup>2</sup> Third, healthy agrarian systems in which small farmers play the principle role tend also to have flourishing non-agricultural activities, many carried out by these same farm families (Ranis and Stewart, 1987). The reasons are discussed in more detail below, but the impact is both to raise overall average incomes and put the communities farther above the poverty line and hence less vulnerable to economic or food crises but also, in broadening the range of productive activities, to provide another safety valve for situations in which there are negative shocks to one important set of activities (usually the agricultural ones). Finally, productive egalitarian communities are relatively free of violence, much of which has its origins in inequalities and the related poverty, dissatisfaction and jealousy. They tend to be socially efficient in that they are able to arrange more effectively for the provision of public goods (education, health, etc.), including crisis relief. Finally, the positive bonds which unite families raise their proclivity to provide direct assistance to each other in times of crisis, complementary with the public provision of such assistance.

The healthy agrarian context (where this term is interpreted as a little broader than structure) includes also a healthy relationship with the rest of the economy, including the government, in which public investment in infrastructure and in research and development allows the sector to grow and where neither it nor the rest of the economy dominates policy in such a way that sectoral exploitation occurs. (Cambodia fits here)

Unfortunately, data leave no doubts that millions of families in developing countries are landless or nearly so, that many live in very bad and precarious conditions and that, accordingly, the

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the Cuban Revolution arose not in the context of particularly low average incomes in agriculture but of a high degree of landlessness combined with a high degree of seasonality of labour demand in the sugar fields. The seasonally unemployed workers were a major factor in the unrest leading to the revolution.

need for land reform remains great in many countries. FAO compilations indicate that the purely landless population (presumably among people living in rural areas but check this) rose from 171 million people in 1980 to 180 million in 1985 (Alamgir and Arora, 1991, 97). In Asia and Africa as a whole, one-third to one-half of small-holders have to subsist on small holdings of less than one hectare. Many are in marginal areas and have to support relatively large families (average family size tends to be markedly bigger in rural than in urban areas). Data on the inequality of land distribution show no general trend in the Gini coefficient, though this is a very rough measure of inequality.<sup>3</sup>

The pace of effective land reforms has clearly been very slow since the early 1960s, by which time the East Asian "successes" had already taken place and Iran's reform was in progress. Ethiopia and Kerala (India) underwent significant reforms in the 1970s. But most other efforts have been either of little significance (many examples), reversed (Nicaragua) or not real reforms at all in the sense used here of changes which increased the access of people towards the bottom of the income distribution (Kenya, Mexico).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps more ominous than the infrequency of positive reforms in recent times, however, has been the prevalence in certain parts of the world of the opposite--situations in which vulnerable groups have lost rights to land to more powerful groups, to the state which then makes it available to cronies or to other favoured groups, or to "the market" in cases where restrictions on sale have been terminated. Both in terms of its direct impact on human welfare, and in terms of its relevance as a determinant of the

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<sup>3</sup> Land is of course only one (albeit usually the main) possible source of income for rural families, so access to other jobs can take the sting out of landlessness. Unfortunately data are seldom available on both access to land and that to other sources of income. But life expectancy figures and other indicators of welfare leave no doubt that in today's world the main victims both of chronic poverty and of emergency crisis are those in rural areas. Whereas historically in the now developed countries life expectancy was greater in rural areas (Easterlin, ) than in urban ones, that situation is reversed in today LDCs.

<sup>4</sup> The neo-liberal wave of thinking in economics has coincided with and no doubt contributed to a set of "reforms" or trends favouring unconstrained rights to land and the Western system of tenure. In Africa the "reforms" undertaken in Kenya are perhaps the extreme example of this sort. In Mexico recently the constraints which have characterized the **ejido** system have been loosened with a view to improving the allocation of resources in that sector.

likelihood of CHEs, more ground may have been lost over the last half century to the various forces which tend to deprive the poor of land access than has been gained in the reforms which have been undertaken, and the greater concern at this time may be to curtail these negative forces than to energize the positive ones, though of course both are at all times relevant and important. That half-century has seen the relative decline of the quasi-feudal land elites of many countries, traditionally the enemy of egalitarian land distributions and of social progress; land reform has been a factor in that decline in some cases and break-up of lands through the inheritance process has played a role, but more generally the old system has lost ground because it is increasingly inconsistent with the increasingly modernized, commercialized economic structure towards which economies have been evolving. The new and aggressive agricultural elites which have been taking over from the quasi-feudals are commercial, often export-oriented, and increasingly in favour with governments around the world. Their pattern of displacement of small farmers, pastoralists, and/or forest dwellers is unconstrained by the sort of patron-client ties the quasi-feudals have had with the peasant class; often their land grabs pit them against organizationally weak groups, not in favour with government, and of at least somewhat different ethnic group. Sometimes the displacement is little more than a test of strength (as in the case of the Sudan--see below); often it occurs in the context of the "modernization, i.e. Westernization" of the system of land rights from an original system which involved communal rights to an individualized system. All such displacements involve some degree of tension and nearly all involve some violence. Whether they are likely to produce CHEs depends both on the extent to which they push the losing group into poverty and desperation, and on the extent to which the displacement itself generates hostility and violence directly. Sometimes there is a long delay between the initial displacement and the ultimate flare-up of violence and CHEs. The roots of El Salvador's recent civil war were laid by the 19th century displacement of indigenous groups by the expanding coffee industry. In other Central American countries such as Guatemala it was the post World War II agro-export boom which largely laid the base for the decades of violence to follow.

Many land struggles involve very uneven forces on the two sides of the fight; in such cases poverty, malnutrition and the violence of repression are more frequent than is open fighting. In other situations the contending forces are more equally matched, leading more often to major confrontations, massacres, and CHEs. Where two hostile ethnic groups provide the cleavage which defines the dispute, as in Rwanda, this is perhaps especially likely. The underlying, continuing purpose of the conflict, however, is access to land. In some instances long repression, poverty and desperation leads to civil war as in El Salvador. Wherever the contending forces are or are perceived to be of comparable strength, the likelihood of

war and associated CHEs is high.

This essay elaborates on the above relationships between land access, land structure and certain types of emergencies. Section 2 reviews the evidence on the impact of land structure on incomes, poverty and social structure. Section 3 looks at the record of famines, epidemics, rural violence and other types of crises in order to clarify the causal links with land distribution. Section 4 summarizes the main relationships identified.

## **2. Land Distribution and Small-Farm Policy as Determinants of Income Distribution, Poverty and Vulnerability to Emergency**

### **2.1 The Pressures for (and Obstacles to) Redistributive Land Reform: Historical Perspective**

"Entitlement", the phrase ultimately made popular by Sen (19 ), sums up the problem of economic insecurity associated with lack of guaranteed access to income of some sort. In poor societies the main direct source of income is land, so it has always been the case that access to it and the income it could provide has been a central theme of society. Over long periods of time settled agrarian societies (e.g. most of China) have tended to go through periods of land concentration which would eventually produce a crisis of poverty and insecurity; this, in turn, under auspicious conditions would generate a peasant uprising, which might if successful lead to a significant redistribution of land. As long as poverty exists in developing countries, a significant share of it is likely to be located in rural areas, and as long as this is the case access to and distribution of land will remain a political and welfare issue of the first order.

Access to land use takes a wide variety of forms. In geographically fixed farming societies rights to the use of specific plots of land for cultivation are central. In pastoral societies rights to use are more naturally collective; this pattern holds often in the case of agro-forestry as well. Where there are complicated interactions between pastoral and farming societies, or in cases where the same group exercises both types of activity but at different times and places, the pattern of access rights may be quite complicated, a product of trial and error and of compromise among affected groups. For present purposes it is adequate to think of two basic systems--fixed cultivation and the rest, the latter involving a range of structures and patterns and tending to be more complicated than the former. As a result, government interventions are more likely to produce effects other than those intended (whether for good or bad) through failure to understand the system at hand.

The reasons for land reform and the pressures which occasionally lead to it are thus near universal across countries and over time. Long-past reforms responded to pressures very

similar to those in evidence during this century and exemplify the large social gains which come from successful reforms, the frequent reversal of such social and economic gains, the tendency for gains to be concentrated among families who are not the poorest, and the frequent lack of complementary measures in support of reform beneficiaries. The experiences of the Greco-Roman era illustrate the alternating tendencies to concentration and reform. Solon, the great Greek leader of the sixth century B.C. cancelled debts related to land and prohibited the mortgaging of land or of personal freedom on account of debt (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1973-74, Macropaedia, Vol. 10, 638). In the Roman empire concentration had occurred by the second century B.C. as a result of public lands being usurped and concentrated in the hands of the nobility. Not only did such concentration reduce the number of owners but also, because it was accompanied by a decrease in cultivation and an increase in grazing, it reduced employment and increased the poverty of the peasants, producing a crisis. The reform process begun by Tiberius (131 B.C.) was followed up by the Gracchi; they attacked this usurpation of land and sought to return the public domain to small cultivators, motivated by both sympathy for the poor and concern with political stability. Naturally the nobility resisted. After the murder of Gaius Gracchi in 121 BC the reform was reversed within a decade and another period of concentration set in.

The French revolution overthrew that country's version of the medieval tenures which persisted in one or another form throughout Europe. It freed all persons from serfdom, led to peasants taking over the land on which they had been working and, in 1792, to the cancellation of all payments related to land. Land in the hands of the clergy and political emigrants was seized, but the terms of its sale often favoured the wealthy and a new class of large landowners arose among the supporters of Napoleon. Though feudalism was destroyed and the new regime won peasant support, the economic effects were limited since the tenants already had security of land before the Revolution, size of operation did not change much, and no facilities for credit or marketing were set up.

The Mexican reform of 1915 followed a revolution and dealt mainly with the lands of Indian villages which had been illegally absorbed by neighbouring haciendas. Though legally there was no serfdom, the Indian wage workers or peons were reduced virtually to that state by indebtedness. Though a decree of 1915, reaffirmed by the constitution of 1917, voided all land alienation which had taken place since 1856, loopholes, litigation and reactionary forces slowed implementation and only after the Agrarian Code of 1934 and the Cardenas administration did effective reform occur. But the redistribution of land was not complemented by a substantial program of support for the small **ejidatarios**.

In Japan, although the Meiji government (from 1868) had

formally abolished feudalism and declared the land to be the property of the peasants, usurpation by the rich and by moneylenders had created classes of perpetual tenants and absentee owners. In 1943, 66% of the land was operated by tenants who had to pay 48% of product. Conflict between landlords and tenants was widespread. After the war and the breakdown of the urban economy the absentee landlords returned to the land. But the allied occupation army instituted a reform, designed by experts for the special conditions of Japan. It has proved very successful.

In Ethiopia maldistribution of land led to redistributive land reform. When the population expanded into what is now the southern part of the country the conquering generals and soldiers received large tracts; a type of serfdom of the conquered gradually evolved into share-cropping. In the 1960s as mechanization of major areas led to tenant eviction the situation became critical. The revolution of 1974 was triggered partly by this and the resulting land reform established credibility in the minds of the rural population (Bruce, 1988, 39).

### **2.1 The Expected Benefits of Land Redistribution for the Incomes of the Rural Poor: Better Distribution of a Bigger Pie**

Income distribution in an economy and in particular in its rural sector depends on both the distribution of land by ownership and that by operating unit. A relevant categorization of agriculture-based families might distinguish rentiers (who do not engage in farm activities but live from land rent), large farmers, small owners, small tenants, and landless worker families. (Another group, not relevant to the present discussion, are workers on state farms.) The dividing lines between such groups are somewhat arbitrary and differences are often matters of degree rather than kind. Also very relevant to the implications of a given land distribution is the extent of non-agricultural activity in which various of these groups are involved along with their agricultural work. In some systems there is a high level of landlessness (families which neither own nor have access to land to cultivate) and the most desirable (though not very frequent for political reasons) form of land reform is the transfer from large owners or the state (where it owns significant amounts of land) to this group. Reforms more frequently involve many small (and perhaps some not-so small) tenants whose problem is more the rents they have to pay and/or the insecurity of their tenure to land rather than total lack of access; in such cases reform usually gives land title to the tenant. Sometimes, though less frequently there are few outright landless and few tenants; the poor have land but too little of it; in that case the logical reform transfers land from large farmers or public lands to already-existing small owners.

As long as total output stayed the same in the face of a land reform which decreases the concentration of land-holding, poverty



and the related vulnerability to emergencies would decrease since the distributional impact would be positive. Most students expect the output impact of land reform to be positive, or at worst neutral, with the result that under a wide range of circumstances a positive effect on the income of the poor is to be expected, although where the positive output effect requires complementary support by government and such support is not forthcoming, it may not appear or may even be negative. The starting point for most positive conclusions on this point has been the frequently observed inverse relationship between size of plot and land productivity (Berry and Cline, 1979; Lipton, 1983; Binswanger et al, 1993). Factors contributing to that relationship include the greater labour use on small farms due to the lower opportunity cost of that factor and its higher productivity due to a less serious supervision problem, the greater incentive to earn on the small farm (especially relative to absentee-owned large farms of the sort often criticized in the literature on Latin America); higher land quality and greater proximity to large urban centres, and a few other factors. When land quality is taken account of (by focusing on efficiency units of land) it appears that the inverse relationship remains generally intact (Lipton, 1993, 645). It is usually accepted that large farms have the advantage of easier access to credit and to technical information; one result of the latter advantage has been their usually earlier adoption of new higher yielding varieties of crops and the frequently higher yields they achieve for specific crops. During the heart of the adoption period for such varieties, the overall productivity gap in favour of smaller farms has normally shrunk and perhaps sometimes even disappeared<sup>5</sup>, but after such episodes it is normally present once again (Lipton, 1993, 645). It has very rare for estimates to show a rising land productivity by farm size (if indeed any have). Although it is possible that this may occur on occasion when land quality is taken into account<sup>6</sup>, the strength of such an association would seldom be strong enough to throw into question the expectation that a redistribution of land towards smaller units

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<sup>5</sup> Higher average land productivity on smaller farms can in principle come from higher yields for most crops or from an output mix in which higher land productivity items have a greater weight. Both are frequently observed. In many cases the second factor appears to be the main one at work, however, as in Colombia of the early 1960s (Berry, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Since a negative relationship between size and land quality appears to be fairly frequent (Bhalla and Roy, 1988).

would have the effect of reducing poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the microeconomic evidence on the inverse relationship between farm size and land productivity<sup>8</sup>, the benefits of certain types of land reform receive confirmation from (or at least are not contradicted by) the record of output and income growth after their implementation. That record strongly suggests that reasonably well executed reforms will not lower the rate of output growth in agriculture and may raise it, as the microeconomic evidence suggests. The most famously successful reforms are those of Japan, Taiwan and Korea, all undertaken immediately after the Second World War, and under pressure and/or assistance from the U.S. government. After the Japanese reform output grew at 3-4% per year over the 1950s and 1960s, with the land productivity increase accelerating from 1% per year before the reform to about 4% after. It remains a matter of debate, however, whether the outcomes would have differed greatly in the absence of a reform (King, 1977, 199-202). The Korean and Taiwanese reforms also saw quite satisfactory output trends after the reforms (Ban et al, 1981; Lee and Chen, 1979). The picture, while less clear in the case of the two major reforms of Latin America, Bolivia and Mexico (excluding Cuba and the more temporary reform in Nicaragua), also seems to be positive. Thus Eckstein et al (1978, 43) argue that, though there may have been a temporary shortfall in Bolivia during the takeover of estates and the associated period of turmoil, by the late 1950s the average annual growth of output of potatoes, corn and rice from before the reform were all quite high. In the case of potatoes, where the pre-reform relationship between yields and farm size was strongly negative, the rapid output growth continued through the 1960s as the small farmers applied high dosages of chemical fertilizer to this crop. In Mexico, where the low incomes and backward technology of the ejidal sector (created by the land reform coming after the Revolution of the first decades of this century) are frequently bemoaned, in historical perspective and given the stingy government support the performance looks more creditable (Berry, 1984, 78). According to Yates (1978) both land

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<sup>7</sup> The evidence of any link between tenancy and land productivity is a good deal cloudier, with the empirical studies (less numerous than for the relationship with size) throwing up few regularities. Some findings are reviewed in Hsiao (1975). With farm size taken into account in the analysis, most studies find differences of only 10% or less by tenancy category (usually in favour of owned farms).

<sup>8</sup> The isolation of land productivity as the relevant measure of productivity is cleanest when labour is in surplus and other factors are not important. Otherwise the situation becomes more ambiguous.

and labour productivity rose markedly on these farms between 1950 and 1970 (figures are less available for earlier periods), though less rapidly than on small or large private farms. Similarly with the land reform begun in Iran in 1962, which transformed a society of extremely wealthy landlords and virtual serfs into a more equitable system of small peasants, and though there was no serious attempt to complement the land redistribution with better extension, credit services or distribution of water rights, the output effects seems to have been substantially positive (Aresvik, 1976, 96-100). The small and medium sized farms created in this reform had productivity levels over twice that on large farms even though a smaller percentage of their land was irrigated.

### **2.3 The Ideal Land Reform**

The experience of history, both ancient and more recent, provides clear hints on the sort of land reform which would be of greatest lasting benefit to the poorer members of an agrarian society. Its central features would include:

(i) relatively low ceilings on parcel size, both to discourage the post-reform reconcentration of land and to assure as wide a distribution of benefits among potential beneficiaries at the time of the reform. Generally the best arrangement is one which distributes all available land essentially equally among all families, since this produces the most egalitarian result and since it appears that the inverse relationship between size and land productivity generally continues to hold for very small parcels. For a very few crops economies of scale may come into play and call for a different structure. A redistribution which leaves a substantial large farm sector or leaves open the possibility of development of such a sector (Bolivia, Mexico) runs the risk that government dedication to the reform sector will be weak and that sector will not get the support it needs to be productive.

(ii) implicit in or related to the first requirement, the inclusion of landless workers as well as tenants among the beneficiaries. Frequently this does not happen, most often for political reasons (as in Kerala, West Bengal, Peru).

(iii) a good package of complementary support measures in the areas of infrastructure, credit, technical assistance, etc. Its presence (as in Japan, Taiwan) or absence (as in Mexico, after the revolution) is a major determinant of the output effects of the reform and therefore of the degree of poverty alleviation which results.

Most of the successful reforms have created small private farms. In real life the main exception has been the creation of state farms or cooperatives of one sort or another, reflecting a belief in the existence of economies of scale or an ideological preference for such units rather than small private farms. Both

forms have tended to perform badly, for reasons which are relatively well understood.

The main exception in terms of what is desirability pertains to those situations, now mainly in Africa, where some form of communal tenure appears to operate relatively well and where rigid application of the "western" model runs the risk of both lowering output, worsening distribution and disturbing traditional practices with meaning and value in the context of the society. Reyna and Downs (1988, xi) argue that the decline in the productivity of farmers in many African countries (or the slow growth of that productivity) is in part the result of central governments which have weakened or replaced traditional and highly effective systems of land allocation and social life by favouring the individualization and commercialization of land, by making concessions of fallow land to the new government elites, favouring the urban proletariat over the rural dwellers, etc. The new local elites have transformed the traditional rules and conventions about land tenure to new ones which work to their benefit.<sup>9</sup>

Inequalities in landholding in Africa have almost always been of modest degree; the accumulation which takes place tends not to be cumulative. In highland Ethiopia the indigenous system developed its own ways of redistribution under heavy population pressure (Bruce, 1988, 38). But where skewness has been severe its explosive

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<sup>9</sup> Individualization has gone much farther in Kenya than elsewhere. In central Kenya the process was associated with a very successful period for smallholder agriculture, though it is unclear how much the process contributed to this outcome. In other counties the strategy has not played out as expected (Bruce, 1988, 36). Kenyan farmers have largely failed to comply with the legislation and where they have done so it is with objectives different from those anticipated by its architects (Green, 1986). The massive program of consolidation of land holdings, cadastre and registration of individual titles begun in the 1950s was expected by some to lead to a skewed distribution through sales, but few expected those in charge of the adjudication process to exploit it to appropriate land for themselves (Bruce, 1988, 44). The failure of the adjudication teams to recognize secondary rights in land was prejudicial to many, including major groups such as women. Sales have not contributed to efficient consolidation; plots purchased are often far from existing holdings. Land is often bought as security for loans, for speculation, or to hold for children's eventual needs; most purchases are financed by income from non-agricultural sources and do not create the hoped-for "yeoman farmers". The process has been leading to new landlessness, some increase in tenancy and major rural-urban migration, partly due to the landlessness.

potential has tended to be similar to that in Asia and Latin America, e.g. the cases of the white settlers of Kenya and Zimbabwe, which fostered people's movements.<sup>10</sup>

Though freehold tenure was supposed to afford the security needed to enable owners to make the capital improvements to raise productivity, in fact access to land is less secure than under the indigenous systems which focused on such assurance; the new system leads to insecurity in part because of the continual and confusing overlapping of the systems (Hobben, 1988, 18). Several careful students of African land systems, whose views are presented in Reyna and Downs (1988) feel that what is needed is a new approach, showing much greater respect for the traditional systems and trying to effect a good synthesis of elements of various systems and in as democratic a manner as possible and one which takes account of the needs of all participants.

Where access to land is a matter of bureaucratic discretion it clearly can lead to concentration, as in Kenya and, earlier, in many countries of Latin America. It does not appear to have done so in Zambia; in Nigeria mishandling of allocations has led to deep resentments (Bruce, 1988, 46).

#### **2.4 Why are Serious Land Reforms so Infrequent?**

The infrequency of the type of land reform which can so effectively raise welfare must have several explanations. The main and most obvious one is the opposition of the vested interests (large landowners) who would lose. In most still-agrarian societies they are the power group, regardless of the political structures under which the country operates. But not insignificant roles are often played by (i) lack of awareness of the actual or potential productivity advantages of small farms--more often than not agronomists and policy-makers have believed and still believe that agriculture is characterized by economies of scale<sup>11</sup>; (ii) a reluctance to tamper with rights to private property, even if the property was accumulated illegally in the past, and an often associated preference to avoid such extensive "intervention" as these sorts of reforms entail, even though at the end the presumption may and should be that the new private farms will function at their best in a system of effective markets. The attitude of the World Bank, the most powerful of the international

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<sup>10</sup> Other cases have been due to ethnic conflict and conquest; the most dangerous are those where the subjected group remains on the land in a servile status (Bruce, 1988, 39).

<sup>11</sup> This erroneous belief is shared, in one of the great intellectual ironies, by both the supporters of big private capital and by many socialists who support big state or cooperative farms.

development institutions, is illustrative. As Christodoulou (1990, 187-192) points out, the Bank has traditionally skirted this most important of all desirable "structural adjustments" for reasons which are essentially political.

Prosterman, Temple and Hanstad (1990, 4-5) suggest that one reason why land reform is not the subject of consistent or coherent attention by aid donors or policy-makers in countries where landlessness is acute may be the invisibility of the poor, and "the issue arises in conspicuous form in only a handful of countries each decade where revolt or famine grabs the attention of media, the public, and governments. Yet awareness that it remains a problem simmering beneath the surface in many settings could avoid last-minute panic and help develop programs and remedies that would replace this institutional inattention." Christodoulou (1990, 144) notes with unfortunate accuracy that "Agrarian reform is introduced to meet a difficult situation--agrarian conflict. It is never applied to anticipate problems. In other words, benign, advance generosity or visionary zeal, or even wise providence, never enter the equation." This is a sad but basically accurate assessment, perhaps only exaggerated in the sense that more positive motivations have been at least present if not definitive in a number of cases.

### **Partial Successes**

Very few reforms have scored high on all three of the conditions mentioned above. But many others still made notable contributions to the social and economic welfare of poor, at-risk people. Thus, Kerala's 1970s reforms benefitted former tenants but not landless workers, and the support for the new farmers was unimpressive. Sill, the impact was very important (see below). In Egypt, Iran and Mexico (post-revolution) also, the reforms were very imperfect and incomplete but still made significant contributions.

Another set of partial success in raising the incomes of small farmers involves cases where there is little redistribution of land but strong support for existing small farms, whether owned, rented or share-cropped. During the 1970s and subsequently, intensive rural development programs were one of the policies many countries considered as contributing to growth with equity in the rural areas (Johnston and Clark, 1982). While success has been mixed, reflecting different public sector capacities at responding to small farmer's needs, some have clearly had a substantial impact on the welfare of this group, as appears to have been the case in Colombia (Ministerio de Agricultura y Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, 1990). Brazil's small farms have also achieved a quite substantial increase in productivity, for example over the 1970s (Thiesenhusen, 1982???)

### **Dangers of Failure or Misdirection**

The pressure for land reform can be unproductive or even backfire when the counterforces are strong or the process ineffective. Several routes are strewn with negative effects and outcomes, even when accompanied with success on some other fronts. (i) A number of reforms--most notably that of Mexico after the Revolution, but also Bolivia after its revolution, have been partial in the sense of leaving the country with a significant part of agriculture in the hands of large farmers or capable of being developed by them. This may reflect an only partial victory of reform forces, and/or an only partial dedication of the government to the small farm sector. When this is the case policy support is likely to revert to its normal recipients, the large farmers, while the small farm segment is starved. In the case of the two cited countries, the failure to support the small farm sector also reflected the fact that the government remained dominated by non-indigenous people and the small-farm sector was mainly made up of that group or of **mestizos**. In any case, with little support in the areas of infrastructure, research, extension and marketing assistance, the small farm sector is certain to perform less well than it might have, providing evidence in apparent support of those who do not consider it to have much potential anyway. A mediocre performance can eventually lead, as it has recently done in Mexico, to a sort of counter-reform which removes constraints on sales of **ejido** land, and in the absence of a ceiling on the size of holdings, paves the way for a reconcentration of land.<sup>12</sup> Given the many forces which tend to favour large farms, it seems unlikely that many governments will dedicate themselves strongly to assuring the success of that sector if the large farm alternative is there to be pursued. This "politics-based" reason for low land ceilings adds to the technical argument in their favour.

(ii) Some reforms have achieved considerable socio-economic advance for the rural poor or fairly poor, but in so doing have created impediments to growth of output and productivity such that the longer term performance of the sector is jeopardized. The case of Kerala is an obvious example of this dilemma.

(iii) Lack of support for the new small farmers has plagued many reforms, sometimes because of lack of political dedication to the sector, sometimes through lack of resources or awareness of how

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<sup>12</sup> The recent debate on this policy in Mexico echoes that of the 19th century in several Latin American countries prior to the removal of the constraints on sale of land which formed part of the reservations (resguardos) for indigenous people. Their removal paved the way for them to lose much of their land.

important such support is.

(iv) The politics of land reform creates a vigorous search for ways to evade the necessity, for political compromises which do something to assuage the tensions arising from rural poverty and inequality, but which are less painful to the large farm elite. In countries with still unoccupied land, the natural candidate is settlement, a policy pursued with varying levels of intensity in some countries of Latin America, in Indonesia, in Malaysia, etc. (It is of course an ongoing process substantially independent of public policy in many cases--as in Brazil and the Philippines, so sometimes it is hard to say where policy begins and natural evolution ends.) Land expansion through settlement has been important as a source of increasing output and employment in agriculture in many countries. But in very few if any could it be said that public policy to facilitate such settlement has provided enough of a safety valve against the pressures of inadequate access to in any serious degree substitute for a true land reform. Usually the new lands are of marginal quality and/or too physically removed from population centres to create a significant income possibility. While settlement schemes have undoubtedly served as an escape valve for social unrest in many countries; frontier areas are often, among other things, a hard place from which to mount organized protest against the centre, though they are often good terrain for guerrilla activity. Since these schemes often have their political attractiveness not in any clear evidence that they will make much of a contribution to the landless farmers or to the country but rather that they will allow the land-owners to avoid or postpone the day of reckoning, they are frequently carelessly designed and weakly implemented. Among the errors in design which lead to the often disappointing performance of settlement schemes are: a tendency to be too centralized in their administration, and designed on the assumption that all settlers will succeed, which never happens and leads to idle land and other forms of waste; excessive paternalism in the form of constraints on crop choice, technology, marketing or labour market participation, which are either not enforceable or have negative impacts on settlement success; choice of collective cooperatives, which always fail (Kinsey and Binswanger, 1993, 1490).

## **2.5 The Impacts of Land Reform and Strong Support policies for Small Farmers: A Sample of Relevant Experiences**

Although the historical record leaves it clear that the objectives of what is above described as an "ideal land reform" are not easy to achieve, it also leaves no doubt that the more successful land reforms have been signal events in the histories of the country or province/region where they occurred and that even



partial successes can be very important indeed.

The experiences in Japan, Taiwan and Korea are most frequently cited as coming close to the ideal, since they promoted equity, contributed to growth (as best can be judged), and laid the groundwork for vibrant rural non-agricultural economies (in varying degrees among these countries). They put an end to rural unrest where it existed (especially in Japan). Almost no one was left out to constitute a continuing landless class. This latter outcome was partly the result of the use of low land ceilings to the size of holdings, and also in part to the fact that these were essentially tenancy systems with most of the relatively poorer farmers being tenants. The objective situation was an easier base on which to build a strong and inclusive small-farm system than most others. In the dramatic case of Taiwan, where per capita income grew at over 6% per year between 1953 and 1980, while the distribution of that income was improving, the average income of families in the bottom quintile was probably rising at close to 10% per year (Berry, 1989, 207). Contributing to this exceptional record was the earlier investment by the Japanese in infrastructure and in research, technical assistance and dissemination; the unusually high levels of education, and the vibrant rural non-agricultural sector which contributed greatly to the incomes of farm families, especially those with the smallest farms (Ho, 1979).

The reforms which have been implemented in Kerala (India), Iran and Egypt in the post-war period all fall well short of the ideal but, as noted above, each had significant positive impacts. The Kerala reform was the most radical, far-reaching and comprehensive in South Asia and, because of the extent of its success, one of the most interesting cases of the last half-century. The puzzle of Kerala is why it succeeded in the absence of outside pressures such as those at work in Japan and Taiwan (occupation by a nationalist forces which had just lost a peasant war on the issue of agrarian reform on the mainland); outside pressures from the national government have, in contrast, worked against reform in Kerala. In addition, it is one of the few radical reforms to be undertaken by a democratic government. The details of this case are worth pausing on.

Herring (1990, 49) concludes that Kerala's experience demonstrates the potential for fundamental alterations of agrarian society in a positive direction under a democratic regime. Legislation implemented in the 1970s effectively vested land in tenants and abolished landlordism as an institution. It had "historically operated as an especially oppressive and exploitative system, depriving lower orders of rural society of political rights, dignity, and basic human needs. These reforms could be legislated and implemented because of the extraordinary mobilization of a coalition of the rural poor and reformist urban groups under the auspices of the local Communist party, which had abandoned the insurrectionary path and functioned electorally much

as a social democratic party in the European sense. The length, intensity and staying power of that mobilization stands out as anomalous in India."

Agrarian radicalism has a long history in this state. Fear of rural instability, related to unrest, evictions, and violence with communal overtones date back to the early 19th century. Both religious identification (Moslem) and ethnic identification contributed to the coalition centred around the communists who ultimately came to power. The leadership was unusually free of the theoretical baggage associated with European Communism (Herring, 1990, 55). Kerala had been integrated at an early date into international trading networks, and was therefore hard hit by the depression of the 1930s, when the number of landless or virtually landless agricultural labourers increased dramatically. Rural non-agricultural activities are important, both in general and in the case of the "agro-poor." A form of worker-peasant alliance was therefore a natural.

The success of this reform can be attributed to a situation extreme enough to generate great tension, to other contextual advantages and to astute and effective leadership. On the first count, the ratio of people to land in the state is three times the Indian average; landlessness, tenancy and unemployment are high. Locally, landlordism was extremely oppressive, the caste system extreme (inapproachability along with untouchability), sexual exploitation of poor women was common, as was serfdom bordering on slavery (Herring, 1990, 56). The moral outrage produced by these conditions was necessary to maintain tactical and substantive radicalism. These forces were strengthened by the linkage of agrarian issues to broader social ferment and demands for national independence from the 1920s onward by a leftist group willing to learn from experience and very dedicated to its constituency. The fact that landlordism had been buttressed by and associated with the colonial state helped. The quickening pace of commercialism had disrupted society and heightened tensions. Various groups were ripe to challenge aspects of the system. The Communist Party of India opted for a platform emphasizing that the extraordinary promises made by the Congress Party during the independence push could only in fact be fulfilled by the communists. Over time, as it became clear that Congress was unalterably opposed to major agrarian reform and unlikely to fulfil a number of the other promises which had legitimated their leadership, this platform became credible.

The Kerala reforms abolished the landlord-tenant system completely, along with the institution of ground rent. All cultivators were to be owners and there was to be no ownership without cultivation (Herring, 1990, 59). A relatively low ceiling (above which land would be expropriated) was set at 5 acres per adult with total limit of 20 for a very large family, but this netted little land since landlords had subdivided holdings or sold surplus land in anticipation of a reform. The ceiling would have

had greater effect around 1960 had Congress not dismissed the government after the Communists first electoral victory and given the landlords another decade to dispose of and subdivide their properties.<sup>13</sup> The reform affected about 43% of the non-plantation land in the state; tenants were a quite significant 43% of families with interests in land. Though the state's acquisition of land over ceilings permitted only a modest number of new farms, attached labourers also benefitted from house or garden site provision, which has proven important in allowing production of food for home consumption and hence improving nutrition. State land, though low quality, was distributed in small parcels of 0.26 hectares. Implementation of the reforms was a continuing struggle, requiring both legislative tinkering and massive demonstrations, though violence was no more than is typical in Indian elections (Herring, 1990, 60). A split in the Communist Party actually energized the process, as the left wing communists in opposition mobilized the tenants and landless to keep up the pressure on the often recalcitrant bureaucracy and the government; without this element Herring (1990, 61) concludes that the implementation might have moved with the sluggish and corrupt manner typical of reforms in the region. The courts were a major obstacle, as vested interests drew on top lawyers to gut key provisions. But such opposition, and that from the central government in Delhi, was met by mass pressure made potent by the widespread literacy, effective local organizing of the underclasses and extensive politicization. Newspapers were widely read and their exposure of fraud made it harder to perpetrate.

Tenancy was abolished with comparative ease. Rent arrears were scaled down. Landlords had strong incentives to comply in order to begin to receive compensation; some cut deals with tenants, fearing that government compensation would not come. That compensation was rather low and, with the effects of inflation, this meant that the

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<sup>13</sup> The Communist Party's victory in the 1957 election, with a programme of abolishing feudalism and generating capitalist relations in agriculture, was the first step (Christodoulou, 1990, 145, citing Nossiter, 1982, 150). The Agrarian Relations bill of 1961, after the central government had imposed presidential rule was watered down to protect the landed interests. Real agrarian reform was implemented by the second communist government's 1969 legislation.

beneficiaries did well.<sup>14</sup> It appears that benefits were rather concentrated among the larger class of tenants; holders of more than 2 ha. got 64% of the redistributed tenanted land. This led to some disaffection and anger among the landless.

The Kerala experience is of special interest because much of value was achieved even though such helpful conditions as positive outside pressure were not present and none of the three criteria for an ideal reform were met. This and the fact that neither the Indian nor the Kerala economy are on the sort of fast growth path from which Japan, Korea and Taiwan earlier benefitted, leave the magnitude of the long run contribution of the reform open to question. Will it ultimately be judged the single most important event in Kerala's socio-economic history, because its important short-term benefits paved the way for subsequent progress, or will those short-run benefits erode under the continuing pressure of population growth, still-strong caste divisions, and slow economic growth?

Though not deserving a full score on the first criterion of low ceilings and as equitable a distribution of land as possible, the reform stacks up better than most.<sup>15</sup> Both the lands from the ceiling expropriation program and state properties were distributed in very small parcels, defensible both in theory and by the evidence from the results. The exemption of plantation crops (tea, coffee and rubber) on the (doubtful to the point of implausibility) grounds of economies of scale, severely limited the impact of the expropriation program. It was consistent both with directives from Delhi and with the communist's ideological tenet of coming down on rentiers rather than capitalists, which in fact were in principle to be fostered. Further, the plantation workers' unions did not want land division but rather nationalization to make them state employees (Herring, 1990, 64). The danger of reconcentration or of failure to stick to the "land only for farmers" criterion are present though not yet very serious. It is true that too much land is held by people with other sources of income. Although cultivation is organized by the owner it is sometimes done in a perfunctory fashion (Herring, 1990, 70).

The record on inclusion of the landless was not good, though

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<sup>14</sup> On the other side, some landlords were reduced to destitution, as the money was slow to come through and those who were pure rentiers were not well positioned.

<sup>15</sup> The Kerala communists ran the considerable risk of eroding their electoral support through granting property rights to tenants, who might then be expected to shift rightward to the Congress party. The West Bengal party opted not to grant such rights, partly it would seem for that reason.

less bad than in some other reforms. The main source of exclusion from benefits in terms of land access was neither a too high ceiling defining expropriation nor too large parcels provided to beneficiaries, but the definition of "tillers" as those who took the risks (advanced cash for production) rather than those who worked the land. This decision had its political roots in the fact that tenants were the key players in the local leadership cadres, but it contributed to the fracturing of leftist unity after the reforms. The party had promised land to tenants for decades. Unfortunately, the conflict between labour and farm operators is greater than elsewhere in India; even very small farmers hire in a great deal of labour. In the long mobilization leading to the reforms there was emphasis on the unity between these two groups, with the implication that the labourers also would get some benefits when the necessary first step--ridding the state of the landlords, had been achieved; they were the shock troops in the struggle (Herring, 1990, 65). Their subsequent disaffection was strong. Many felt that they had not gained at all and that the larger cultivators had deserted the party after they got what they wanted; they resented the new consumption patterns of the former-tenants. The result was a series of quite militant strikes in the 1970s, leading to the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act of 1974, a remarkable piece of legislation which limited the work day to 8 hours (from the previous 12), established a minimum wage, and guaranteed permanence of employment for attached workers. It was seen as providing security to the labourers and softening the looming conflict before it became violent (though in fact violent confrontations did ensue). The farmers, however, were infuriated by this set of measures whose impact could be to cancel the benefits achieved by replacing tenancy with ownership. Ultimately the unfolding of the politics in this situation defended the landless against exclusion from benefits, but did so in a way which is injurious to future output and income growth. Though some embittered labourers disagree, Herring (1990, 69) notes that the new owners are quite different from the previous rentiers. "...the fear is gone" from their lives. "Labourers remain dependent on others for access to the means of production, but agrestic slavery, acute social humiliation, and oppression have been obliterated or dramatically reduced by social processes of which the land reforms were the central part". "...the conditions of genuine participatory democracy and protection of human rights at the local level have been firmly established" (Herring, 1990, 73). Like few counterparts in the developing world, these field labourers have assured old age pensions.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, tenants got the rights but

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<sup>16</sup> Implementation of KAWAS does remain dependent on local militancy and the priority placed by the government, which varies across villages.

encumbered by a lot of obligations.

On the third requisite, the Kerala reform comes off least well. To the extent that the support system for small farmers depends on the national government (as it does in part) this is not exclusively Kerala's fault. But redistribution did take precedence over production in the reform. It left behind a sort of stalemated class conflict, with neither party strong enough to take charge and push things forward in a rational way. Strikes and lockouts have disrupted production, and owners sometimes leave land fallow to teach the workers a lesson. Yields have risen very slowly in spite of new varieties and modern inputs. Unemployment in the state remains at 25%. Employment opportunities in agriculture were declining during the 1980s. Stagnation of the paddy sector was partly explained by labour control problems; in this irrigated crop labour needs to be available for water control at all times; now it works by the clock (Herring, 1990, 71). Private investment is discouraged by low profit levels, and social investment by the party's attempt to maintain some degree of social peace by picking up the tab in a way which cuts into the investible surplus. Being a state rather than a country raises some costs (apart from Delhi's outright opposition to reform), since capital can be outwardly mobile to other states. More credit and extension services would have expanded the benefits to the new owners and improved the investment climate, but the pressure for their provision was diminished by the bitterness felt by the labourers, whose local organizations would have been a natural local conduit for such pressure. Thus the reforms did not solve the agrarian crisis in economic terms, nor turn a deeply caste-ridden society into an egalitarian one. Although the cultivators are more involved in agriculture than were the landlords, they have used more of their new-found wealth to upgrade their social status than might have been hoped.

Will land finally pass to the real tillers, as some of them expect? Herring (1990, 68) doubts that this is consistent with electoral politics and coalition strategies. In India as a whole cultivators outnumber labourers, and though the opposite is true in Kerala the fact that non-agriculture is atypically important in the state's economy means that only 28% of the total labour force are agricultural labourers.

The Iranian reform is described by Christodoulou (1990, 151) as a white revolution to prevent a red revolution. The country had been emerging from oriental despotism through the early part of the century. A society of extremely wealthy landowners virtually controlled the lives of the vast majority of landless peasants; when the reforms started in 1962 80% of the farming population were sharecroppers or landless workers and the landlords periodically redistributed the sharecroppers holdings in order to reduce their security of tenure and independence (Aresvik, 1976, 97). They

received up to 80% of the crop, plus free labour and other services in off-seasons. By the mid-1970s about 2.3 million families with perhaps eight million hectares had been directly benefited. Land cultivated by the owner, either with machines or with hired labour was exempted from expropriation. The reform did not attempt to settle landless workers and there are reports that some were displaced. Nor was there a serious attempt to complement the reform with better extension, credit services or distribution of water rights. To summarize, though it was far from perfect this reform did reduce the powers of the large land owners and create landowning classes who would form the base for both small and large capitalist farming. The measures were facilitated by oil revenues which consolidated bureaucratic control over all classes, and presumably would not have been possible without those resources.

The Egyptian reform of 1952 is the most comprehensive one outside the communist countries (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1973-74, *Macropaedia*, Vol. 10, 640). At the time, 7% of owners had over two thirds of the private land and 77% of all holdings were less than one acre, tenancy was widespread and rents were exorbitant. The reform expropriated land above 100 acres (the first limit was higher) and gave it out in parcels of up to 5 acres (except for college graduates who got 20). It was implemented quickly and had a positive impact on the morale of the peasants as well as on their income and status. But total output was not much affected; this agricultural system was already an intensive one. After the short-run increase incomes remained low. This qualifies as a case where without an industrial takeoff soon afterwards, the benefits of the reform tend to erode and be lost over time.

Nearly all of the other reforms one can cite have achieved less than would technically have been possible, through failing to meet one or more of the conditions for a high degree of success, usually for political reasons, sometimes complemented by lack of understanding on the part of decision makers and/or strong ideological bents.

Most of the "reforms" undertaken in Latin America, famous for the degree of inequality in the distribution both of land and of income, have been small (relative to the size of the problem), designed to create "middle-class" capitalized farmers, and hence having little or no impact on the rural poor. In Brazil, the country with the largest group of poor people (see Morley, 1995) in spite of its high average income, as of 1991 the country had 3 million rural holdings but half of them belonged to just 58,000 owners, in fact probably to considerably less than this. The call for reform "has grown thunderous" thousands of squatters, have invaded farms and ranches, often encouraged by trade unionists, left-wing politicians and even Catholic clergymen (*The Economist*, April 13, 1996, p.38). President Cardoso has taken up the banner of

agrarian reform and promised to settle 280,000 families by the end of his term in 1999. The invasions, originally planned in secrecy and carried out at night have since then become quite open. Many of the squatters have been tossed off their plots in the past three decades as machines and more modern methods of farming and ranching spread. The opening of the borders to more imports is estimated to have eliminated half a million jobs in the countryside since 1990.

## 2.6 Land Reform Policy

Policy to promote effective land reform faces many impediments, as outlined above. Improving support systems for already existing small farmers is a much more feasible target, though still a far from easy one to achieve. Many prominent students of agrarian issues<sup>17</sup> have concluded that the reduction of rural poverty will come much more from the latter approach than from the former, given the constraints and challenges faced. These are political (first and foremost), ideological, institutional and informational.

The lack of support from the World Bank and the regional development banks illustrates the institutional problem. As the pre-eminent international institution focusing on development policy, the World Bank's views have been pivotal.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand its small farm policy has become more positive over time. Until the early 1970s the Bank provided assistance to large agriculture, and even to large scale mechanization, at a time when research was making clear both the advantages of small farms and the employment consequences of large scale, capital intensive agriculture. After evolving away from its embarrassingly ill-informed diagnosis of this period, the Bank has come to share the mainstream views on the role of small farms. But taking the additional step of supporting their creation through redistributive land reform has not come easily, although indirect support has been provided in some cases; for example, Bank aid for rural development in Northeast Brazil was passed on to the local authorities in the form of support for infrastructure only after they had obtained and distributed land as per the agreed on plan (Lipton, 1993, 652). This helped to induce large owners to make voluntary contributions of land in return for irrigation benefits on the land they would keep (Tendler, 1991).

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<sup>17</sup> Such as Bruce Johnston (personal communication).

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting that the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) has been, at least at times, more supportive, as during the 1960s and early 1970s when the Alliance for Progress was important and the threat of social upheaval in Latin America was of great concern to the United States.



Both the views of the Bank and of other institutional actors have been affected over the last couple of decades by the optimistic position that much of the good which such a reform can produce may be obtained with less damage by helping farm size structure to evolve in favour of small farms by less intrusive interventions than confiscatory reform e.g. progressive land taxes, removal of the subsidies from which large farms have typically benefited in the past, and the strengthening of small farm support policies which are themselves non-distortionary, such as better access to credit for poor farming families (Lipton, 1993, 649).

The lack of broad institutional support for making agrarian structure a policy variable is symbolized by the eye-catching lack of easily usable statistics on that structure. On a matter of pivotal importance to the welfare of so many in the world, the data on trends in access to land and on the inequality of its distribution are, to put it mildly, sparse. The FAO undertook a compilation of agricultural census data a quarter of a century ago; since that time no comparable effort has been made, in spite of the frequently voiced fears that the Green Revolution, the commercialization of agriculture, technological change, the declining influence of indigenous tenure systems, or other factors may have led to significant increases in concentration. Useful figures are, of course, available for a set of countries which undertake periodic agricultural censuses but these are a clear minority of all countries.

What of the potential of a more market-friendly approach to achieving a more equitable distribution of land? As with all such broad questions, one must wait for the record to unfold to be sure.<sup>19</sup> But there seem few grounds for optimism that such approaches, as they are likely to be used in practice, will have more than a marginal impact on agrarian structure. In an impressive look at this issue in the context of Chile and its "exclusionary agro-export growth" Carter and Mensah (1993) model the agrarian structure and the likely response of various categories of farm groups to two of the widely suggested instruments to achieve a better distribution of land. They conclude that even without the destabilizing impact of stochastic shocks, peasant farms face a large competitiveness gap in the land market. "...land market reforms which leave untouched the structure and rules of access to factor markets, thus face a daunting task" (ibid, 1097) Land mortgage banks may have some promise, while progressive tax policy appears much more limited in its potential impact. A basic problem

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<sup>19</sup> The limited historical evidence available does suggest some prospects for direct use of market and tax incentives to move land into the hands of smaller farmers, as in the case of Ecuador, but the effects were not large (Zevallos, 1989).

is what Binswanger (1987, 1091) describes as the "fundamental financing problem of poor people" the fact that to borrow money to buy land with all markets perfect and scale neutral technology requires curtailing consumption below what one could earn on the labour market."<sup>20</sup> Allowing for market imperfections which make labour cheaper on family farms, Carter and Mensah find that very small units may survive because the land is worth a lot to guarantee employment in an unpredictable labour market with unemployment but after this effect has worn off the reservation price of land falls starkly with size over a range because of the capital constraints on using additional land.

Without traditional confiscatory land reform, the new approaches are unlikely to make much difference. When complemented by such traditional reform, they may have greater value (Lipton, 1993), partly through the "threat effect" which can make landlords more flexible in the face of expropriation.

Removal of legal constraints on land subdivision is a minimal enabling device (Lipton, 1993, 651). Credit schemes may need ceilings to become operative, and run the risk of raising land prices to the point where the former owners lose little or even gain and of cheating by the powerful patrons who get access to such credit through various forms of chicanery, as in the case of Kenya (Lipton, 1993, 651). Removal of subsidies favouring large farmers or their crops can be a valuable supportive device for credit or land laws to help the poor, and can be nudged along by the fiscal stringency faced by so many countries. Lower subsidies helped discourage the rich from subverting reforms in Northeast Brazil though other positive steps were also taken there.

Regardless of the views and practices of the international agencies, rural poverty will continue to exert pressure for land reforms. If the new approaches to modifying agrarian structure prove ineffective, the traditional one is likely to come again to the forefront. If so it is to be hoped that not too much time is lost or unnecessary poverty suffered in the interim.

Teh coutner-land refoms of recent times will take a while for thier

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<sup>20</sup> An extension or implication of this problem is that, while improving access to credit by improving land markets so that land can better serve as collateral has obvious advantages, the other side of the coin is that it lowers the security value of the land. Where a farm family's socio-economic security can be assured through some mechanism other than the guaranteed access to a piece of land, because that land is inalienable, both objectives can be served. A strong rural non-agricultural economy obviously helps but that usually comes after the strong agrarian system has already 'performed'.

effect on welfare and on CHEs to be felt. Mexico, Africa, etc.

## **2.7 Defense Against the Loss of Existing or Traditional Rights of Access to Land**

As noted earlier, in some situations the political and policy issue is whether a progressive land reform will take place or not, and whether, accordingly, some marginalized families will be made better off thereby. In many other contexts, however, the issue is whether those groups are losing ground through their own and the state's failure to defend their current or past rights. Though here the need is for maintenance of the status quo (or some acceptable modification to it) rather than "reform", the arguments are remarkably similar to those for reform, as outlined above. Typically the efficiency and risk-reducing benefits of traditional land systems, not to mention their value as part of coherent social systems, are underestimated by proponents of alternatives; currently the favoured alternative is the Western-style system of individual land rights and free land markets, i.e. no constraints on purchase or sale. Often the rhetoric in which this contrast of systems is couched is more than anything else a screen for a way to take land from its traditional users and give it to someone else--the powerful interests which form the government or are in favour with it. This pattern extends from Central America to Sub-Saharan Africa to many other parts of the world. Many of the (generally erroneous) arguments used against the break-up of large farms through land reform are here marshalled in favour of the need to create new larger farms and get the land away from the inefficient traditional farmers. As might be expected, the primary victims of these trends are groups with no political voice, often marginalized ethnic groups. Where governments are themselves central to the "land grab", meaning that they lack the legitimacy which would come with concern for all of their citizens, there is little to be discussed about such situations; experts can only try to throw the spotlight on them and describe them for what they are--land grabs. Where governments are more neutral and amenable to argument, there may be some hope that their experts will come to a fuller understanding of the situation. In the case of equalizing land reform, and even more in that of provision of decent support systems for small farmers, the quantitative evidence on the relative efficiency of smaller farms appears to have had at least some influence on the views of policy makers and politicians, though the intuitions of most non-experts have always tended in the other direction and the weight of reasonably educated opinion did not change for a couple of decades after the evidence started to come in from India. The process will perhaps be even slower and more difficult when the issue is the relative performance of traditional land systems and the Western system. In the case of land reform, the key discussion in fact surrounded the

relative productivities of small and large farms and on this there was eventually ample evidence, fairly easy to collect and understand. Meaningful and persuasive evidence on the relative efficiency of land systems is likely to be harder to come by. Although numerous experts have been sounding the alarm for at least a couple of decades now, the process of Westernization has continued without, it seems, a great deal of professional debate in most of the countries where it is happening. The ideological component underlying the neo-liberal policies remains strong and tends to crowd out analysis. Thus in the case of the "reform" of land markets in Mexico, what one too often hears are the simple text-book arguments for free markets, with no recognition that both historical experiences in Mexico and in other countries provide some evidence on the other side, as does a more careful analysis at the macroeconomic level, especially when it takes into account the transitional processes. In the debate around farm size and efficiency the issues were essentially economic, involving factor market imperfections, economies of scale, etc. An appreciation of traditional land systems is subtler and hence even more likely to escape the already ethnocentric views of many "reformers."

### **3. Relevant Characteristics of Humanitarian Emergencies**

The relevance of land reform as preventive of serious humanitarian emergencies lies in the fact that it creates conditions under which both famines and rural violence are less likely to occur.

Famine and political conflict tend to go together and to reinforce each other. Should we separate them at all?

#### **3.1 Agrarian Reform and Famine**

The work of Sen (19 ) and others has helped to clarify the factors which contribute to famine and the resulting suffering and death. Although obviously related to a general shortage of food, as everyone's intuition suggests, they are also related to the distribution of purchasing power and of capacity to produce food for one's own needs. The phenomenon of some degree of starvation and malnutrition in economies sufficiently productive to keep everyone easily above the poverty line where inequality is less marked is well enough recognized. When, instead of involving a small percent of the population, that lack of capacity to either produce or purchase for oneself extends to a significant proportion of the population, it constitutes a famine.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The American College Dictionary defines famine in alternative ways, some implying that the basic problem is a general lack of food ("extreme and general scarcity of food") and

The likelihood of mass starvation may usefully be viewed as the result of four determinants: the average level of income and productivity in the society; the typical level of inequality; the extent of fluctuation in purchasing power in the society as a whole and especially for the poorer part of it, which depends in part on fluctuations in local production and in part on the extent to which prior reserves or current borrowing can be used to smooth such fluctuations by buying from other countries or regions; and the extent to which better off members of the society are able and prepared to help those less well off, especially in situations of crisis like that of a famine. A famine is a crisis of capacity to get food, by production or purchase. An absolute shortage of food contributes to it by increasing the scarcity of food and raising its price (if markets are the sole arbiter of its distribution). A high level of inequality contributes to it by pushing the capacity to obtain food lower for some unfortunates than it would otherwise have been. And a society which lacks either the capacity to provide mutual assistance to its weaker members at such times (e.g. because the poorest are geographically remote from everyone else) or the willingness to do so will fail to avert crises that could be averted.

In many famines each of these "weaknesses" is present to some degree. As noted earlier, a strong small-farm agriculture is likely to be the best possible preventive since it raises total agricultural output; it usually implies that a higher share of that output is of basic foods (as opposed, for example, to export crops); it often involves a mixture of agricultural products and helps to generate a vibrant non-agricultural rural sector which further increases the income earning opportunities of the populations; and it tends to go with a strong social network which is likely to improve the likelihood of mutual assistance. Although such assistance is by no means unknown or even uncommon in patron-client situations, it appears to be less pervasive and predictable than in small-holder societies.

(Discussion of several of the major and better studied famines in developing countries, and the extent to which each of the above positive features broke down.)

The regressions of Nafziger and Auvinen show slow food production per capita growth to be a source of humanitarian emergencies. Of course since Africa is the region in difficulty and it has the bulk of the CHEs, this may not be as illuminating as it appears at first glance to be. Would need to take Niger out of these figures since its problem was in part Dutch disease. Between 1960 and 1988 India's food production tripled from 50M tons, while SSAfrica's was essentially stagnant at that level (47).

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others focusing on the outcome ("extreme hunger; starvation").

The deteriorating food position began before the droughts in the SAHEL (1968-74) and can be traced back to colonialism (Eicher and Baker, 1982, 20-23, cited 48). The continuing crisis is due to African government neglect of agriculture. After independence African political elites needed to buy the support of urban elites and working classes rather than small-holders (47). Within agriculture the payoff was with commercial and export-oriented agriculture. Also just inherited from the colonial period. Project based policies preferred to price based ones as it helps to create patron-client system (48). Highways and steel mills rather than water pumps, tube wells, etc. (48). There is an inverse relationship between farm size and land yields due to low imputed costs of own labour and monitoring (Cornia, 1994, 217-29, cited, 49). But a policy bias in favour of the larger farms. During the liberalization of the 1980s and early 1990s the WB, IMF and donors set conditions of agricultural policy with emphasis on getting rid of distortions. Empirical studies suggest these comprise only a fraction of the explanation for the falling output per person (49). Infrastructural and research deficits, tenure insecurity and the very inefficient new private commercial agriculture (favoured by urban elites), and others. The emphasis on individual property rights by IFIs and African elites has reduced efficiency (49). Registering individualized land titles lowers security in the short run as it increases the number of land disputes. Shapries take advantage of the innocent and less well connected to increase their registrations. Women especially face difficulties in having their traditional rights recognized by the political authorities. Kenya as a case in point during the individualized titling since the 1950s (50). In Nigeria extensive tracts were granted to friends of state officials (50). These redistributions contributed to the inverse association as well as lowering labour intensity, spatial formation and innovation.

Disruption of food trade by domestic political conflict contributed to millions of deaths in Africa (5)). Food deficits of course contribute to refugee problems.

Sen's "entitlement" approach which includes political pressure. The Indian system does not react to chronic malnutrition but does to severe famine. The Chinese response is rather than the opposite; much less chronic problems, but less response to critical situations because of confident dogmatism and lack of political opposition (51). The political economy approach goes beyond Sen's (shared by most scholars and international agencies). In allowing for possible state action to remove entitlements from certain groups, e.g. the Soviet famines of the 1930s (51). Over 1992-92 all the countries with the highest numbers of deaths (over 10,000) were in Africa except the former Yugoslavia components (3). Ake describes state-making as the equivalent of primitive

accumulation but more violent, a matter of conquest and subjugation. Revoking the autonomy of communities. (cite, p. 52). Ruling elites look for local collaborators and can allow these to exploit local populations in return (52). de Waal, Dufield and others see famine more as a matter of transfer of resources from the politically weak to the politically strong, in which case it is best viewed as part of the war or conflict itself.

Marginalized groups in northern Somalia (Dinka) became destitute not only from drought but from the fact that the state stripped them of cattle and other major assets (Dufield, 1994). See his good quote re asset transfer becoming cultural genocide. Famine is usually the result of the disruption of a way of life--note this may also be vs. Homer-Dixon. The state often withholds false relief from certain victims, as in the case of Somalia. In contexts like these the distribution of land is just part of the bigger puzzle, but it is at the least symbolic of the struggle since land, cattle etc. are the survival necessities.

Military coups are often direct precursors to CHEs (54)

Norman, David W. (1997) "The Failure of Agricultural Development and its Linkages to the Urban Economy" paper presented at UNU/WIDER-Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford meeting on "The Political Economy of Humanitarian Emergencies" July 3-5, 1997, Oxford. In the typical case with emphasis on food self-sufficiency, there has been too much emphasis on getting the output, regardless of how or by whom. "food security at the national and household level necessitates placing greater emphasis on the "who" and also the one relating to "how" if there is concern about the food security goal being sustainable in the long run." (16). Although those responsible for technology development have been somewhat sensitive to differences across ecological settings they have been far less sensitive to the socioeconomic component of differences across farmers, until the FSD approach (which had as a basic principle the incorporation of the farmers into the process). The result, apart from wasted research, was that the better endowed farmers, in both of the above respects, were the big beneficiaries and the result was increasing inequalities (17).

We could add the experience of the North American indigenous peoples to this.

### **3.2 Agrarian Structure, Rural Violence, and CHEs**

Rural violence is the second major form of humanitarian emergency which arises with some frequency in agricultural societies. Chronic, systemic violence can be serious; our main concern here, however, is the outbreaks which create more general emergencies. These tend to take the form of guerrilla wars--pitting rebels against the state, which may turn into large enough affairs

to be called revolutions, and of ethnic, class or other forms of organized violence in rural areas. Often the class backdrop to violence overlaps with the ethnic component.

Clashes over wealth are one of the most pervasive sources of violence in developing countries; some would say that they are at the root of almost all such clashes. Since land is the principal asset, it is also the principal source of tensions and conflict in many situations, from outright agrarian revolutions to chronic but severe rural violence, to a variety of other manifestations.<sup>22</sup>

Most twentieth century revolutions have been linked to agrarian inequality (Edelman and Seligson, 1994, 446). This was the case with the Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century (Katz, 1988) as well as the "peasant wars" in China, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador and others.<sup>23</sup> Wolf (1969) argued that the great revolutions of the 20th century were fundamentally peasant wars. "various parts of the world peasants--subsistence oriented agricultural producers subjected to the authority and economic exactions of a state, or a landed class of overlords, or both--faced the destructive advance of capitalist relations and values." (4) Capitalism advanced undermined the peasants' access to land, resources, and sociopolitical mechanisms they normally needed to sustain their way of life. In Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba, peasants rose up in great defensive mobilizations that made revolution necessary and possible." Ironically, in shattering the old order, the peasants facilitated the rise to power of revolutionary groups, political parties, and states whose interest in social transformation might, in the end, hasten the peasants' own destruction or subjugation."

If there is a simple recipe which accounts for a large number of rural conflicts it involves two components: a large group (or groups) aggrieved because of lack of access to land, and a sufficiently even balance of power between this group- and its opponent (whether the state or a land-owning elite, the combination of these two or another aggrieved group). Since the groups in conflict are usually ethnically different or can be made out to be, this feature is also very common. Whereas the sense of injustice and aggrievement was present among the indigenous groups of El Salvador was present from the time of their displacement over

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<sup>22</sup> In their cross-country regression analysis Nafziger and Auvinen (1997) find that CHEs are more likely in settings of high income inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient). The same result is reported by Alesina and Perotti (1996).

<sup>23</sup> A major study of such peasant wars is that of Wolf (1969).



a century ago, the timing of its 20th century explosions relate to the severity of the objective situation and the weakened state of the oligarchy (in the early 1930s) and to the fact that a by then strong guerrilla movement in the 1980s felt it had a chance to defeat the traditional powers (see below). Landsberger (1969, 25) concludes that peasant movements start when "Traditional elites objectively weakened and weakening also in the 'will to govern'...permit some peasants to improve some aspects of their status." When the Mexican revolution broke out the Diaz regime was weakened by inefficiency and corruption (rife in the army (Brown, 1971, 193, citing White, 1969). Brown concludes that "there is probably enough despair, anger, perceived relative deprivation and 'consciousness' to start an uprising in most any traditional rural community in Latin America on any given day....Thus whenever the local landed elite begins to lose its grip, usually because of larger economic or political circumstances, peasant activism springs up rather quickly, often with little or no initial debt to outside agitation." (194-5). Debate about the contribution of the peasants and the outsiders and intellectuals in Bolivia.

In Mexico Zapata's agraristas waged a nine year war with three successive governments, and succeeded in gaining official acceptance of Zapata's land reform program, but even then the lands were only actually redistributed in those areas where the peasants were strongly organized and armed. The pace has been a function of the strength of peasant movements; at one time during the Cardenas administration the armed peasant militia numbered 60,000 men who defended not only their land but also the government, which was under strong pressure from conservative forces (196). Militant direct action by peasant groups in Northern Mexico led to another spurt of reform activity under Lopez Mateos (196).

Land invasions in Cochabamba triggered the Bolivian reform in 1953 (196). In that country that MNR supported and helped to spread it to other regions, which was not the case in Mexico, where the counterpart of MNR was not there. Vigorous movements in other countries such as isolated regions of Peru and Colombia have succumbed, partly for want of support from strong, urban-based political movements (196).

Bolivia's elite had been stripped of her rubber plantations, sea coast and Chaco claims. After the latter defeat there was a power vacuum in which peasant groups and other new interest groups began to thrive.

In Venezuela, Betancourt's organizers began to recruit peasant influentials to form sindicatos in 1936. As president of the revolutionary junta (1945-47) he accelerated the pace of peasant organization and carried out an agrarian reform, little known, which greatly increased the power of the peasant leaders (Powell, 1969, 66). The 1948 military coup reinstated heavy repression and peasant leaders were murdered, tortured and exiled and imprisoned. (197). They survived to help topple this regime.

It is useful for present purposes to distinguish among four types of potential conflict situations, based on differences in the direct origin of the conflict and differences in the degree to which changes in land structure might help to alleviate the problem. Many conflicts are the result of attempts by powerful interests--whether private or state or the two together, to dispossess traditional land rights-holders from their rights. In these cases the "solution" to the problem--in the sense of the outcome which would normally be best from the point of view of overall societal welfare and reduction of conflict, would be a clarification and defense of those traditional rights. In other cases the source of conflict is the unequal distribution of land and the pressure from those with little to increase their share at the expense of those with much. Here, the natural solution is an equalizing land reform. In a third type of situation, the direct problem is not inequality, since the conflict involves two or more groups not defined by current landholdings but by, say, ethnic group. Such conflict cannot be resolved directly by land redistribution from large to small. Finally, where there is a high level of tension due to land scarcity, but not much inequality, then redistribution is not the answer either; such a society has no alternative but to seek an increase in land productivity or to find employment opportunities outside the agricultural sector if it is to soften the conflicts. In both of these latter two situations, though, agrarian structure does matter when it is defined broadly enough to include security of access to land, since clearly defined and predictably enforceable rules are important to avoid conflict in all situations. And agricultural policy support for small farms clearly matters in all cases, especially the last one.

Tensions around land are thus more likely to arise when it is unequally distributed, which leads to pressure from those with little, or when the institutions and mores surrounding its distribution do not prevent land grabs by some of the more powerful agents from some of the weaker ones. These tensions between groups defined by their level of access are more likely to break out into open struggles and/or lead to high levels of violence and hence directly to CHEs when neither of the contending sides is able to greatly outweigh the other and subdue it before violence and CHE gets out of hand. In cases where the state is a potential arbiter, its strength is a key determinant; a weak state raises the likelihood that ethnic and other types of violence will develop farther. In many cases the state is on one side of the battle in any case, however. Sometimes two states (e.g. national and local) are in conflict on land issues.

Uncertainty contributes to violence and to CHEs in various ways. Where there is a lack of clarity with respect to who has rights to land, or if it is not clear that other parties will react firmly to any attempts to change the status quo, there is an invitation to aggress. Uncertainty and ambiguity is especially

characteristic of property regimes either in transitions or with competing and overlapping systems, true of much of the world where a traditional property rights system co-exists with a particularly recent Western system of individual property rights.

Whenever the basic conflict over assets is compounded by class differences, ethnic differences, religious differences or any combination of these, the likelihood that it will escalate into full-scale warfare and lead to a CHE is heightened. These latent or actual suspicions, dislikes and hatreds can be mobilized by those who are pursuing the goal of asset acquisition; this both increases the likelihood that conflict will break out and that it will be hard to rein in. It also increases the cruelty likely to be displayed and decreases the humanitarian impulses which might alleviate some of the costs associated with the conflict.

In many crisis situations of the sort under discussion the main tensions are between groups, of the sort defined above. But in some cases there is also a high level of intra-group tension, dislike and opportunistic behaviour to greatly compound the other lines of conflict. When not even within the group is there a maintenance of mutual support and pulling together, then many weak individuals will be particularly at risk, the loss of control, civility and order will be greatest and the likelihood of CHE the greatest.

Many insights into the nature of the links between land issues and CHEs come from the more notorious examples of the latter. Many CHEs, including the majority of those in Latin America and many in Africa and elsewhere, have grown out of a history in which populations were displaced from their lands by interlopers, leading both to long-standing resentments and to extremes of wealth and poverty, and sowing the seeds for later uprisings and violence. The recent CHEs of several Central American countries are among the most recent, with those of El Salvador and Guatemala the most dramatic--El Salvador's recently ended 12 year civil war claimed about 75,000 lives while four decades of armed conflict in Guatemala have killed about 100,000 (Pastor and Boyce, 1998, 4, citing World Bank, 1995). In all of these cases agrarian structure and the need to reform it was a hot political issue. The derailing of the planned 1955 reform in Guatemala by the CIA intervention contributed to decades of continuous violence in that country. Some countries, like El Salvador and Nicaragua, did wind up having some sort of reform, but in no case was it early enough or complete enough to lay a healthy base for socio-economic stability.

The roots of El Salvador's conflict date to the latter half of the 19th century when it became a major producer of coffee. Most of the well-suited volcanic slopes of central and western El Salvador were held by indigenous communities as communal property (Pastor and Boyce, 1998, 5). Such property was abolished by state decree in 1882; by the turn of the century the communities had been

forcibly evicted and the best coffee lands converted into latifundia, owned mainly by the so-called 14 families, who formed the apex of one of the most inequitable patterns of land distribution in the world. The groups pushed off now provided seasonal labour to the estates, while working the rest of the year on their minifundia. The coffee oligarchy often deployed military force to maintain rural law and order and to suppress intermittent peasant revolts. The most serious of these occurred in 1932 when the Great Depression pushed coffee prices down and the employers cut wages and employment; 10-30 thousand people died in the massacre which followed (Pastor and Boyce, 1998, 6). Military governments kept the lid on brewing tensions, driven by the severe inequality of income and of access to land, until 1979 when a modernizing military coup, undertaken partly with a view to fending off a revolution, mixed progressive steps including an agrarian reform law to nationalize the large estates with some repression (Pastor and Boyce, 1998, 7). Rather than resolve the land problem, these steps triggered a dynamic which led to civil war, as detailed by Pastor and Boyce (1998). Before the reform phase which would have most benefited the peasantry or most harmed the coffee oligarchy was reached, the process was cut short, repression was heightened and the revolutionaries persuaded that only by a military victory could they achieve their goals. Among the elements of the peace process were a modest approach to problems of inequality, including land transfers to ex-combatants and FMLN supporters though these have involved long delays. Land reform of the needed scope never occurred. Eventually the land issue will fade into the background as El

Salvador becomes urbanized. But the land problems will have contributed mightily to the CHE deaths. As in all civil war countries, there was a serious erosion of law, order and security.

A common feature in all of the Central American experiences of rural violence has been the displacement of populations when their lands become valuable to others with more political power, usually in the context of new export opportunities. In El Salvador, as noted, this process occurred mainly in the 19th century. Another wave occurred in Central America after WWII as cotton and beef exports grew quickly in Guatemala, Nicaragua and other countries of the region. Many peasants were driven off their land as export agriculture generated "zones of exclusion" (Bulmer-Thomas, 1987, 161 cited p. 20). As in the case of El Salvador, these countries suffered "reactionary despotism," which generally received help from the outside--U.S. intervention to put down the Sandinista uprising of 1933 and to block the Arbenz agrarian reform of 1954. Foreign involvement became less reactionary with the coming of the Alliance for Progress in 1961, although the wave of reforms adopted in the wake of the declaration of Punta del Este were mainly cosmetic (Barraclough, 1994, 18), but even the fact that the IFIs have finally accepted a sort of role does not imply any

serious chance of major reform; given the conservative ideology currently ruling in those agencies it more likely defines an upper limit to the possible effects they may have, via such low influence steps as provision of low cost credit for land acquisition of the poor.

Mexico's early 20th century agrarian revolution fits the same mold as the more recent Central American tragedies. It was immediately preceded by a sweeping consolidation of rural holdings between 1880 and 1910 which "detached an ever-increasing number of peasants from the land and created a new class of agricultural wage laborers" (Reynolds, 1970, 136). The previous combination of haciendas and small subsistence plots held by Indians or mestizos, together with the innately lazy and unproductive Mexican peasant himself, were held jointly responsible for the backwardness of agriculture in the country. Accordingly, the government supported this enclosure movement, "in which federal land and peasant communal holdings, as well as other private properties with titled titles, were redistributed to private and development companies and to individuals successful in gaining favour with the administration." Until about 1985 the impact of this transformation on rural incomes was disguised by the positive impact on wages of improving terms of trade for agricultural exports. But when rural real incomes began to fall after that date and the urban demand for labour also slipped, the agrarian reform movement was sparked, especially in the states which had previously experienced a high degree of commercialization and land consolidation (137). Pressures mounted for a return of those communal and private holdings which had been taken over; the enclosure system had deprived the peasants of their security and economic independence.

Peru

Cronshaw.

The experience of Northeast Brazil historically fits in this pattern, more broadly defined, whereby growth based on export of certain items tends to make the poor worse off, depending on the mechanism.

None is more tragic than the cases of Rwanda and Burundi. André

and Platteau (1997, abstract) conclude that, together with the terrible heritage of ethnic conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu groups in Rwanda was a high level of intra-group violence, which contributed greatly to the magnitude of the tragedy. On the basis of an in depth case study of a densely populated area in the Northwest of Rwanda (1988-93) they conclude that "acute competition for land in a context of slow growth of non-agricultural income opportunities has resulted in an increasingly unequal land distribution and rapid processes of land dispossession through the operation both of the (illegal) land market and the evolution of indigenous tenure arrangements. The pervasive incidence of land disputes and the threat of landlessness have led to rising tensions in social relations and even within the core of family life, thus paving the way for more and more overt expressions of disharmony and violence. A connection between these ominous conditions and the civil war that broke out in 1994 is established." Land concentration and rising poverty occur not only through disequalizing market transfers but also through the "gradual erosion of customary social protections following the commoditization of land"--when acquired through the market land becomes exempt from customary rules and restraints (2). In that setting the Malthusian trap can result in bitter tensions within families, intra-community hatreds and violence, and strong social questioning of (backlash against) the evolving regime of market-allocated individualized property rights (1-2). Obligations to redistribute land in favour of land scarce kin cease to apply when land is purchased instead of handed down (34); this holds for sisters and even for children. Distress sales of inherited land makes the transition from the one system to the other. Loss of family land to strangers is a major setback to be redressed as soon as circumstances allow, but only 6 of 247 transactions were retrieval in character, so not much was going on (35). Increasingly the indigenous tenure arrangements are drawn exclusively so that return migrants, divorced women, orphans, etc are being kept out (35). Widows are especially victimized for fear that their children will become land claimants. The desperately poor people who steal to live and are more or less tolerated and distinguished from other thieves (34).

According to some reports, land distribution remained relatively equal until the early 1980s (30), but then the change appears to have been rapid. André and Platteau argue that there has been a rise in intergenerational inequality of holdings, though this is not clear from their table.

The area studied was characterized by a high level of tension and conflicts and violence (31). When these lead to litigation, the result is often a loss of land. About 40-45% of conflicts were around land issues--succession, transactions, boundaries, etc. A third were conjugal and the rest a variety (33); the authors claim that these figures understate the share due to land issues because

these often underlie other conflicts. They question the findings in another region which put land conflicts quite low relative to other causes (33). The most disquieting form of conflict is intra-family between father and sons. The traditional form of inheritance was patrilineal, with land going to elder sons to hold in a sort of corporate ownership, with the understanding that he would grant the younger sons enough land to subsist (38). As land got scarcer, direct transmission to all sons became the norm, though the elder son now got an additional share. Early apportionment among sons is now the norm (39), e.g. each son gets his share at time of marriage. Elder sons may resist the withdrawal of lands over which they had previously been granted use rights (39). And sons may pressure the father on the grounds that he has kept too much for his own use or against his rental to non-family members. The tradition of the youngest son taking care of parents has largely fallen into disuse (it got that son an extra share) so the father now feels a need to keep more for himself (40). Parents feel neglect and abandonment in their old age. Conflicts of sons with "caring strangers". Feelings of total vulnerability by some old and weak persons; many just let themselves die (41).

The situation was increasing difficult as early as 1988--more disputes, more violence, atmosphere of fear and isolation and an increasingly uncontrollable group of young thieves and delinquents, often but not always landless youth without earning opportunities.

This village was part of a region especially rocked by the violence in 1994. It especially resented the Tutsis, as they had been implanted by the Belgians, replacing their own authorities.

Though the civil war was started by macro-political forces cynically playing on ethnic divisions in order to retain power, the land-based conflicts went a long way to setting the stage for violence and allowing it to spread so quickly and devastatingly. Quote from Austin might be sued (43). Those who died were disproportionately people with relatively large landholdings or people considered to be troublemakers (44) or who behaved opportunistically, e.g. acquired land through off-farm earnings but did not redistribute. The troublemakers included those suspected of poisoning, or being violent. Almost half of this group died vs. 5.4% confirmed, overall.) So the war provide an opportunity to settle scores or to reshuffle land properties (46). The one Tutsi (widow, with large land) was the first to be killed. quite envied. The poor, especially, children also dying greater than average proportions (46).

The case of Rwanda is rendered especially difficult, on the one hand by the immense population pressure resulting from first population growth and the lack of development of other sectors and on the other by the history of ethnic violence. But it is noteworthy that the erosion of the traditional system of land rights has contributed greatly to dispute and conflict, both directly through the way it deprives groups of what would under the

old system have been their rights, and because of the uncertainty it breeds. Possibly the erosion is mainly a function of the extreme degree of land scarcity. Andre\*\* and Platteau note that in Kenya most smallholders, even after registration of land title, do not do the things that registration seeks to empower them to do, such as selling or mortgaging the land without consulting family or neighbours (cites) (47). In Rwanda they do those things, and this has contributed both to the marketization of land and the many tensions and problems associated with it. Here private property rights have emerged even in the absence of state-led registration. The security of land transactions is reasonably high. But land disputes are common and contentious. The "adaptation paradigm" people like Bruce and Atwood argue that compulsory and systematic titling is justified only when the customary tenure system can no longer deal with the situation in an effective way, as here. Perhaps no system would work too well here though. Modern courts are "considered by ordinary people as bodies manipulated by rich and well-connected individuals."

Klugman (1996) notes that "Earlier historical factors, together with growing inequality and major land pressure in recent decades, suggest the potential for a humanitarian emergency in Kenya. such an emergency would follow an outbreak of large-scale group conflict in the country."...increasing poverty and inequality in the context of economic decline and severe population pressure has been associated with the marginalization of significant numbers of people" (1).

The various rifts in Kenyan society. Intra-ethnic conflict can be as great as that between groups, e.g. intra Kikuyu (6). IN the main agricultural regions, where 60% of the people live, the main distinction is between small farmers and large ones, a division traceable back to colonial times (6).

Land FIGURES MORE CENTRALLY IN THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICAL CONFLICT THAN IN MOST AFRICAN STATES (WEEKS AND YOUNG, 1996, CITED 13). 86% of Kenyans are in rural areas (13); is this true? One of the few African countries that undertook widespread adjudication and titling programmes (13) Political and economic elites have been able to get large tracts of land. With population growth the average size of landholding fell quickly over 1982-1992 from 4.9 acres to 4.0 (14). Much subdivision through inheritance. very fast in some poor areas. Landlessness not common but very small plots are.

Much movement of cultivators, especially Kikuyu, onto lands claimed and used by pastoralists, typically through individual purchases (14). The Masai lands have shrunk substantially. Some studies indicate that registration has lessened land disputes while others report the opposite (15)

Keen (1997) Notes that the aim of many actors in civil wars is not to overthrow or maintain a particular system but to circumnavigate the law in order to realize some immediate material gain, so war dovetails with crime (3). Picking on unarmed civilians often easier



than confronted armed opponents. Forces civilians to joined armed gangs for own protection (3). REbellion porvides a cover for all sorts of crime. Continued esitence of a revbellion may legittimate authoritarian or military rule (4). Many things the in-group does are technicaly legal only becasue that group has jsut rediefined ti to be so, e.g. military's right to raid private hourses in Sierre Leone (5). Where groups feel that are not likley to be protected by law they may take protective coutermeasures. Cnetre groups which cannot rule without the collaboation of t local elties may have to give them license to unetake the sort of violence they prefer (6). In teh sudan's second vcivil war, trders and landowners fror the north have been given the to vilently appropairate fertile land in th Nba Moutnreian region; this has consolidated support for reht regime in Khartoum (6). Simialr i Somalia aunder Barre (6). IN Aire and Iraq the regimes have sougt to build support among particualr families, clans and ethnic gorups by granting them eonomic priveleges that include the firight to inflict violence without redress (6).

IMPOTANCE OF SETTLING OF SCROES, AS IN sERBIA (7). MOST SUCH RESENTMEENTS PROBABLY RELATED TO SOICAL AND ECONOMIC INEUQLAITIES (7). tHUS RURAL sERBS RESENT URABAN MIDDLE CLASS mUSLEMS WHOSE POSITIOSN THEY FLET WERE OWED TO COLLABORATION WITH THE tURKS (76). Rural Cambioidands resetned the ruan dwellers for selling out to the Americans and their bombing campaign.

Teh Central american CHES have typically grwon out of history in which populaitons were dipslaced from thier lands by interlopers, leading to extrmes of wealth and poverty and sowing the seeds for later uprisings and violence. In nealry all cases agrarian reform was a hot poitical issue. Teh derailing of the plannd 1955 rerom in Guatamela by the CIA interventon contirbuted to decades of continuous violence in that coutnrey. Some countries, like El Salvador and Nicaragua, did wind up hainvg some sort of reform, but in no case was it early enough or complete enough to lay a healty base for socio-economic stability.

Pastor and Boyce note that El Salvador's reently ended 12 year civil war claimed about 75,000 lives while four decades of armed conflict in Guatamala have killed about 100,000 (4). The cuases of conflict cneter on the distriubvion of income and land and the oligarchi structreu of per. Teh roots of El Salavardos conlict date to the altter half od the 19th cnetru when it bacem a major producrer of cooffee. Most ofthe well-suited volcnaic slopes o cnetral ane western El Salvadro were held by indigenous communities as communal propoerty (5) Such property was abolished by state decree in 1882; by the turn of he centruy the communiteis had been forciably evcited and the best coffee alnds converted into latifudnia, wowned mainly by the so-called 124 families. Teh reuslt was one fo the most inegaliatrain patterns of land dsitirubion in

the world (5). The groups pushed off the land became "free" to work on the estates, but much of the need was just for the harvest; the rest of the year they worked on minifundia. The coffee oligarchy focussed on keeping labour cheap, often deploying military forces to maintain rural law and order and suppress intermittent peasant revolts. As the Great Depression pushed coffee prices down, the employers cut wages and employment, contributing to a peasant revolt in 1932 (6). Martí helped with this uprising, which was however quickly crushed with loss of 10-30 thousand people in the matanza which followed (6). Military governments kept the lid on the brewing tensions; there was only one elected president between 1932 and 1980. Eventually leftist and other forces began to consider the need for armed revolution. A modernizing military coup of 1979 was partly to avoid revolution; it incorporated some reformist civilian leaders (7) and behaved in a somewhat schizophrenic way, mixing some repression with some progressive steps, including an agrarian reform law to nationalize the large estates (7). Too little too late, but did weaken the traditional elites, some of which responded with "death squads" to target leftist leaders and community organizers. The FMLN concludes the only route is violence, which breaks out.

Inequality is generally conceded to have played a significant role in the Salvadorean tragedy, and nearly everyone agrees this inequality was driven by land tenure; Seligson (1995, 44) rated it one of the five most extreme cases of land concentration. It contributed to low rural incomes, migration to urban markets and resettlement. The FMLN found greatest support in the countryside (9). The agrarian reform of the 1980s was not enough. It quickly took 15% of land in the nearly 500 largest properties of cattle as well as sugar, cotton and coffee ranches (benefitting 40,000 families) in a few months; two additional phases were to take another 40% over a much longer period. The second (25% of land) would have had a sharp impact on coffee sector but was not implemented, while the third phase would have allowed peasants to buy the small lots they were renting. (here just 5% instead of 25% was transferred (10).

With the incomplete reform went increasing repression of populist forces--even non-violent leaders began to fear and went into exile. The land reform was seen by some as a manipulative move to derail a more progressive agenda. Also the FMLN was convinced in the early 1980s that it could win a military conflict against what seemed an unpopular government (11). The outside involvement frustrated those expectations. Both the military government and Duarte in 1984 decided to go for a military solution (11) with U.S. support. By 1989 the importance of the traditional landed elite had declined, partly the result of the rural civil war (16).

Among elements of the peace process were a modest approach to problems of inequality, including land transfers to ex-combatants and FMLN supporters, microenterprise and housing

assistance for ex-combatants and some expansion of poverty alleviation programs(17). The purge of the army corps was delayed and require strong international pressure (18). Land transfer also involved long delays. But 1994 elections were generally peaceful.

Land reform of the needed scope never occurred. Eventually the land issue will fade into the background if El Salvador becomes urbanized. But the land problems will have contributed mightily to the CHE deaths. As in all civil war countries, there was a serious erosion of law, order and security.

A common feature in all of the Central American experiences of rural violence has been the displacement of populations when their lands become valuable to others, usually in the context of new export opportunities. In El Salvador this process occurred mainly in the 19th century. The experience of Northeast Brazil historically fits in this pattern, more broadly defined. Whereby growth based on export of certain items tends to make the poor worse off, depending on the mechanism. 19th century El Salvador is typical of the negative one. Another wave saw the benefits of Central American growth after WWII--notably cotton and beef, very unevenly distributed (20). Many peasants were driven off their land as export agriculture generated "zones of exclusion" (Bulmer-Thomas, 1987, 161 cited p. 20). All three suffered "reactionary despotism." All three had histories of resistance and violent suppression, with outside involvement in the other two (21). Although the IFIs have finally accepted a sort of role, a lack of political will was present in the limited land transfer programme in El Salvador (29). Partly because gov't uneasy about titling land to former military opponents. In Guatemala negotiations to end the interminable civil war took the form of a series of separate accords (32) with one on agrarian issues. The IFIs seem to have taken a more pro-active role than in El Salvador (32). The IDB and WB present at 1995 discussions on socio-economic and agrarian accords (32). The government has provided low cost credit for land acquisition of the poor.

Although Coomiba's periodic waves of great violence, unquestionably falling in the CHE category, are most commonly attributed to the long standing and deep political conflict between the two parties (Liberals and Conservatives) and more recently to the presence of the illegal drug industry, land issues have here too played a considerably greater role than meets the eye. Roldan's study of the violence afflicting the Uraba region of the department of Antioquia--still one of the most violent corners of the country, shows the extent to which, although the political party conflict label has been attached to it, the main roots had to do with the control of natural resources. She notes that violence in Antioquia was not widespread but rather concentrated in the physical and cultural periphery, places like Uraba, middle Magdalena and lower Cauca. And the state applied coercive measures only in areas regarded as part of the frontier like Uraba, which were considered

to have growth potential but where the authorities and investors worried about their tenuous influence and control (4). Migration and colonization also increased conflict for resource between distinct forms of cultivation and trade. Winds up in a battle between adherents of the parties or as something interpreted in that way. Economic and social conflicts fed into political ones involving political power and patronage (4). The central authority views the regions as serving its own interests. A military report in 1950 notes that those who complained of guerrilla presence were those with very large properties; fear of extortion more than partisanship spurred the rumors of impending disorder (10). The collaboration between hacendados of the two parties against bandits and against resentful persons from the poorer groups in the same party (19). "Patronage and violence were shaped by economic interests, not just partisan loyalty, while class could divide members of the same party....." (20) Illicit protection rackets organized during La Violencia under the goon squads and so on of today in Uraba. Access to labor became directly linked to a market in influence; need for false documentation for workers, etc. In 1951 the Governor relinquished authority over the area to the military which turned it into an occupied area. (20)

Colonialism concept at the core of all this. Ideas of extractive wealth, political domination and cultural subordination. In Antioquia, the cut between the bourgeois code of values and that which deviates (5). Set of characteristics which came in popular central thought to characterize the "other". I wonder if the strength and pride of Antioqueno culture goes, as in the case of Japan, with a heightened disrepute for others. Difference elided with deviance, etc.

Thinks of a "regional hegemonic project" (7) constructed and deployed by the regions' men of capital and political leaders. The concept of the "imagined community" helps to understand the process.

Advent of violence in Uraba touched off panic among Antioquia's elite and political leaders; just as the Carretera al Mar promised to bring their rich area under their control for capitalist development, the Urabenos exploded in furious assault against the Antioqueno authorities (8).

In Latin America the ultimate full circle irony is the case of Mexico. The political party which grew out of the Agrarian revolution of the early 20th century was some decades later the support for the political and land holding elites against which the Zapatista uprising of Indian small-holders and landless workers or campesinos in the state of Chiapas took place.

Most of the cited Latin American experiences support Fairhead's (1997) view that conflicts are less generated by resource scarcity than resource wealth. Though the most dramatic

of such conflicts often involve mineral wealth (Zaire, Nigerai and many others) land is a frwent factor.

In the first wtwo situaitons described, however, ladh strcuture has a lot to do with teh potential resoution of conflict.

Teh Cambodian tragedy has very special featrues, in cluding the imapct of colonvilism, ethnic cleavages, and involvement in geo-political conflicts, but it nonetheless appears that a number of unhelthy fearutes of th rurla scoio-economyc were contributing factros. After independecen economic develoemtna nd agriculture were erratic (Billon and Bakker, 1997, 10). Large foreign-run foreign plaantations producing for export continued to dominate the (10). Benefits of grwoth not poroperly channelled through the state Corruption and mismanagement of the economy dominated by the Sino-Khmer urban popuatoon By he end of his rule long-standing econmic ineualitlies had been reinforced and the state had been weakened (10).

throughout the pre-war (1970) preiod he great bulk of the rural popoulaiton were small rice producers (10) Though output rose tehier stadnard of living did not. Land was disributed relatively equlaiyy with 84% owning their own land as of the 1962 cnesus, lanlodrism was on the increase by the alte 1960s in a few provinces. Teh OROC set up in 1956 to break the Chines traders monopaoly on rice sales and for usuaroiuos lending evolved intoa rurla segemtnof the civil servcie benefitting currupteed officiials and teh traders. Progressively took over rice trnading (1). this dmpen prodcution and encouraged smauggling and aslaes to the communists in VeietNam. Trade nationalized in 1964. Army units palced in charge of gathering the rice suplsu, leading to armed unrrrest, with tens of thoudands of farmers fleeing and perhaps thousands killed (Chandler, 1996, cited, 12). Teh teh-weak CPK used this dissatisfaction to attract supporters. Teh governmetn hasd ensured long term eocomic delcine. High income inequality (data). Though edcuation ws still lwo there were not enough places in gov't for the graduation Khmers byt he alte 1960s, since they had no repsect for business jobs (17). Teh Chinese and Sino-Khmenr headl a dnear monopoly on commerce and trade as well as high-rnakig gov't positions (17), and were moslty city-dwellers except for the network of rural traders. ...."Impoversidhe rrual socieity disdained by a frustrated urban and edcuated eltie, itself dominated by a circle of cronies, empowered by Sihanouk's approval and a corrupt state apparatus."

REmoved by a coup in 1970. Teh new Khmer Republic heavily spported byt eh USA attempted to suppress an interanl Communist led revolution. Lon Nol begins by brutal suppression of stduents and peasnat movements suuporting the former king. A vietnamese

program. The CPK, assisted by North Vietnam and led by Pol Pot with Sihanouk as titular head gained ground. Mercia carpet bombing of allegedly CPK controlled areas hurts civilian population

allegedly CPK controlled areas hurts civilian population (3) By end of war in 1975, 300-700 m Cambodians had died (4) and 2.5M been displaced. Under the KR 350 thousand die in first five months, mainly executions of government people and the educated. The KR project then fails as agricultural production collapses and widespread famine and epidemics ensue. (5). In 1979 the Viet. offensive topples the gov't (6).

In a tremendous historic irony, the Khmer Rouge believed in radical egalitarian collectivism (25) and that only complete revolution could redress injustice and remove the causes of oppression (24). Hypotheses re sources of their brutal behaviour. Abolished private property and the other sumptuous of capitalism. Main economic goal was to triple rice production, but their simplistic irrigation plans were disastrously misguided, ignoring basic hydrological and technical guidelines. Wanted to annihilate whole categories--merchants, administrators, educated and technically skilled of any kind. The immense destruction due to the war drove the emergency of the early KR period (26). Since they did not keep the support of the peasants they were always dealing with dissidents so always need to rub out someone. (26).

A deliberate process of vulnerability of the vast majority of the population, with massive displacement of the population to break all traditional links of solidarity within families, communities and class groups." (27).

In the Sudan a previously symbiotic relationship between pastoralists and farmers broke down around the early 1980s (Klein, n.d., 5) The nomads organized an "Arab congregation" in 1987 and turned against the farmers rather than the gov't. This was tolerated and at times supported by the gov't. But where the farmers could generate more product, the gov't leaned the other way. Sometimes the state is the source of the conflict, as with the Mechanised Farming Project of 1968; this pushed cultivators off the land and drove out pastoral nomads. In many cases these two groups turned against each other rather than against the state (6). In the lower Jubba valley of Somalia local farmers were forced off the land first to make way for mechanised state farms and then, following the reform of land registration legislation in 1975, by urban elites. All these projects were funded by foreign donors (6). No productivity gain resulted but the political elites did gain (7). The elite then diverted and looted aid relief while forcing the displaced farmers to work on private farms (Menkhaus and Craven, cited, 7).

Previous occupants of land near the mouth of the Senegal river were reclassified as Senegalese and expelled from Mauritania when a barrage was constructed nearly creating a possibility for cash cropping. This act heightened racial tensions between the two

groups in both countries, but ethnicity was the vehicle whereby tensions about the use of land was channelled (7).

Export agriculture's introduction can lead to massive redistribution of wealth and resources within African countries (7).

Levin and Weiner (1996) note that

"Colonial land dispossession and apartheid forced relocations lie at the heart of the repressive regime which the national liberation movement sought to overthrow. A decisive transformation of land and agrarian relations is thus intimately bound up with the construction of a new democratic order in South Africa" (93). Expectations in rural areas run high. Discuss the narrow limits to land reform if the transition in South Africa is carried out via an elite pact democracy (96).

Founding of the ANC was influenced substantially by the proposed land bills which culminated in the 1913 Land Acts. Land and rural struggle in the 1940s and 1950s were important in transforming the ANC into a broad-based national movement. (97). But the mass mobilization of the 1980s and finally the settlement which brought democracy in 1994 was inspired more by the urban mass struggles and the political unionism of the ANC-led Congress alliance than by rural interests. The leadership cadre and guiding ideology were drawn mainly from the urban petty-bourgeoisie and proletariat (98). The movements failed to either lead or follow the peasants (98).

(Discussion of the evidence linking agrarian structure to violence of the various types noted above).

#### **4. Overview and Conclusions**

(To come)

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**Agrarian Reform, Land Distribution, and Small-Farm Policy as  
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by Albert Berry

Department of Economics

University of Toronto

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