

# Some Salient Features of Agrarian Reform in Latin America

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IN THE COURSE of the last century and a half many absorbing and disturbing issues have commanded the attention of those in positions of power and influence throughout the Latin American countries; but the current almost universal concern about agrarian reform is in a class by itself in the degree to which simultaneously it has come to monopolise the attention of affluent and educated Latin Americans and has become the major hope of the masses. As has been stated by one of the most perceptive Latin Americans of our day: "Never was a reform so discussed and debated, in Brazil or outside of it, as the agrarian."<sup>2</sup>

The accuracy of this generalisation by an author who is one of those most conversant with the present situation in all parts of the half continent we call Brazil, in the 19 other nations in the Latin American group, in the newly emerged nations of Africa, and in others of the "under-developed" countries could easily be documented with mountains of evidence.<sup>3</sup> At the present time, though, it is sufficient to indicate that as plans and proposals take form in measures and activities, interest in agrarian reform waxes and debate over specific proposals and accomplishments intensifies. Thus in the press and in reviews of all types, on television and on radio, in political gatherings at all levels and in the halls of the parliaments there is a lavish flow of words having to do with the nature and purposes of agrarian reform, plans and proposals for accomplishing its objectives, and the extent to which the laws enacted and the programmes of the agencies that have been established are attaining the ends for which they were created. This goes on, with the specific topics being determined largely by the stage of development of the programme in the respective country, in all parts of gigantic Brazil, in Bolivia and

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<sup>2</sup> J. V. FREITAS MARCONDES: "Reforma agrária a luz das ciencias sociais", in *Sociologia*, (São Paulo), Vol. XXIV, No. 4, Dec. 1962, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> For a few of the most pertinent sources see T. Lynn SMITH: *Agrarian reform in Latin America* (New York, Knopf, 1965).

Colombia, in Cuba and Venezuela, in Chile and Ecuador, in Costa Rica and Peru, and all the rest. Even in Mexico, where with much reason the past tense may be used in speaking of agrarian reform accomplishments, the reorientation of objectives and the revision of measures continue to absorb the attention of many of the highest officials and most accomplished analysts.<sup>1</sup>

With popular interest in the subject running high, persons seeking governmental office at the local, provincial, and national levels find proposals for agrarian reform, or for modifying programmes that are being attempted, to be important planks in their platforms; officials in the ministries of agriculture and other governmental departments become aware that the ways and means of modifying the prevailing relationships between man and the land are among their own chief preoccupations; and social scientists in the universities, in various research agencies, and in governmental service discover that they cannot remain aloof from the issues. Nowadays they must give substantial attention to the study of land tenure, the distribution of land ownership and control, the antiquated and ineffective systems of agriculture that still devour the energies of the population in many sections, the development of social legislation that will promote the welfare of agricultural labourers, and the problems of community development. Even the heads of the military establishments, with increased frequency, are getting involved publicly in the issues revolving about agrarian reform.

Perhaps, though, the best perspective on the current role of agrarian reform in Latin American affairs is obtained by a thoughtful reading of the two following extracts. The first of these contains the words of Dom Helder Camara, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, and is part of an address he made on 27 February 1963 over a television station in Washington, D.C.:

I am not speaking as a Brazilian addressing Americans but as a man talking to other men. . . . The Alliance for Progress is dead, however much I should hope for its resurrection. The main reason for its failure seems to be the following: it was necessary to establish close co-ordination between the help from the Alliance and the basic reforms, but unfortunately the rich in Latin America talk too much about reform and label as Communists all those who try to enforce it. This is easy to understand: the rich in Latin America go on holding 80 per cent. of the land on the continent. Often they control parliament and have the intensity of their idealism and hope in the future gauged by the bank deposits kept in their names in the United States and Europe. Unfortunately, the rich in your country also create problems: President Kennedy could be a witness to that.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ramón FERNÁNDEZ Y FERNÁNDEZ: "La reforma agraria mexicana: Logros y problemas derivados", in *Boletín de estudios especiales* (Mexico City, Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal), Vol. VIII, No. 93, July 1957, pp. 211-220; and Victor MANZANILLA SCHAFFER: *La reforma agraria* (Mexico City, Departamento de Asuntos Agrarios y Colonización, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> From a press release issued by the Brazilian Embassy, Washington, D.C., 27 February 1963.

The second is the most pertinent part of the solemn pledge made by all of the Latin American countries except Cuba in 1961 in the Charter of Punta del Este, popularly known as the Alliance for Progress. The signatories of the Charter agree—

To encourage, in accordance with the characteristics of each country, programs of comprehensive agrarian reform leading to the effective transformation, where required, of unjust structures and systems of land tenure and use, with a view to replacing latifundia and dwarf holdings by an equitable system of land tenure so that, with the help of timely and adequate credit, technical assistance and facilities for marketing and distribution of products, the land will become for the man who works it the basis of his economic stability, the foundation of his increasing welfare, and the guarantee of his freedom and dignity.<sup>1</sup>

### **Background and cause of the current outburst of interest in agrarian reform**

For anyone deeply concerned about the social and economic welfare of those who till the soil in various parts of the earth, there is much food for thought as to why the current eruption of interest in agrarian reform throughout Latin America should be taking place now. Why did this particular outburst take place early in the second half of the twentieth century rather than about 1800, 1850, 1900, 1920, or even 1940? One does not need to delve much into the writings about Latin American societies by historians, economists, sociologists, and other scholars before it becomes evident that, judged by present standards, most of the indicators of an acute need for agrarian reform have been present throughout Latin America for at least a century and a half. These include, of course, the two-class society with its high degree of concentration of ownership and control of the land; the prodigal waste of the labour of the landless masses, who are paid scarcely enough to enable them to satisfy the mere creature-needs of life; the high degree to which the most fertile and accessible lands in the valleys and on the plains are devoted to rudimentary pastoral activities or left unused entirely while the cultivated fields of the peasants have been confined to the steep slopes of the mountains or to other marginal areas; the considerable extent to which land is an asylum for capital; and the prevailing illiteracy and miserably low levels of living of the rural masses. Moreover, it is easy to find that from time to time and place to place able exponents of substantial changes in the distribution of land ownership and other essential features of agrarian reform have appealed to their compatriots to put measures into effect that would enable the masses of their countrymen to rise above the serf-like existence to which they have long been subjected. Prominent in the list of such exponents are names such as José Bonifacio de Andrade, Tavares Bastos,

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<sup>1</sup> This is the complete text of paragraph 6 of Title I of the Charter.

A. P. Figueiredo, and Joaquim Nabuco in Brazil; and Salvador Camacho Roldán and (more recently) Alfonso López in Colombia.<sup>1</sup>

As events turned out, though, neither the revolutionary forces in Europe and the United States and Canada, nor those which produced drastic changes in two of the Latin American countries, nor even the calls of foresighted statesmen in nations such as Brazil and Colombia made any general and substantial impression throughout Latin America. Thus late in the eighteenth century the extreme and bloody revolution in Haiti which brought about a profound agrarian reform, involving the complete liquidation of the aristocratic, landowning class of masters, the freeing of the slaves, and the wholesale redistribution of rights to the land, produced no tendency towards emulation in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Even though the ferment for independence was going on at the time, with revolts and rebellions soon to break forth, the Haitian experience seems to have had relatively little influence elsewhere in Latin America. Similarly, more than a century later when, after several years of civil war, Mexico's internecine struggle brought about a deep-cutting agrarian reform, there seems to have been relatively little repercussion elsewhere in Latin America. It appears that most of the educated Latin Americans of those two periods, those who alone were cognizant of what was taking place in Haiti and Mexico, considered them as horrible examples of what should be avoided at all costs. The fact is that even during the 1930s, when Portes Gil and Lázaro Cárdenas were effecting wholesale redistribution of landownership in Mexico, such measures enjoyed no popularity among the members of the upper classes elsewhere in Latin America, a small group who owned the land, ran the governments and the economies, and managed the channels of communication; and the great masses of the population in most of the countries, illiterate agricultural labourers who were still in a servile or semi-servile condition and who had practically no contacts with persons other than those from the small neighbourhoods in which they lived—these humble people never even became aware of the fact that a bitter struggle for "land and liberty" was going on in another country called Mexico. Neither did the relatively few members of the upper classes nor the great numbers of persons in the lower classes throughout Latin America make any particular endeavour to extend to the Americas the agrarian aspects of the Russian Revolution or those of the "Green Rising" that swept through Europe after the close of the First World War.

The crucial fact is, of course, that prior to 1920 there were relatively few contacts between Latin Americans and their fellows in other parts of the world, and even less between the inhabitants of a given Latin American country and the people of the others, except, of course, between people

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. SMITH, *op. cit.*, *passim*; and José Arthur Ríos (editor): *Recomendações sobre reforma agrária* (Rio de Janeiro, Instituto Brasileiro de Acção Democrática, 1961), pp. xi-xvii.

living in immediately adjacent nations such as Argentina and Uruguay or Honduras and El Salvador. Moreover, the Latin Americans who did come to know Europe or the United States—practically none went to Asia—were drawn almost exclusively from the more affluent families. During the opening quarter of the twentieth century, in sharp contrast with the situation since 1950, there were no large numbers of Latin American students in the universities in Europe and the United States; the aeroplane, the radio and the automobile were not bringing about millions of social contacts between persons in one country and those in another; international organisations and agencies were not responsible for the visits of thousands of Latin Americans to other parts of the world and the stationing in Latin America of large contingents of experts and technicians from other parts of the earth; and the concerted efforts of various organised groups to promote ideologies of one type or another in the various Latin American countries were merely in a stage of incubation. In brief, prior to 1925 few factors were operating to produce a confrontation between the traditional Latin American values and standards and those which formed integral parts of the social systems prevailing in other parts of America, in Europe and Asia. Or, if the ideas and values did reach Spanish America and Brazil, as for example those of central importance in the French Revolution, their realm of influence was limited to the drawing-rooms of the intellectuals, and they almost never got down to the level at which they could have any particular influence upon the life and labour of the masses of the population, who still remained almost hermetically sealed off in tens of thousands of small, self-sufficient and isolated neighbourhoods and communities. All of this means, in summary, that prior to 1950 it was possible for social systems based largely upon feudalistic patterns and values to persist almost without challenge throughout the huge, highly rural expanses which made up the bulk of the territory and contained a large majority of the people in Latin America.

Before proceeding with the analysis it seems essential to comment briefly upon the nature of the social and value systems that have been mentioned above. Essentially, with some variations which limitations of space do not enable us to analyse here, mankind has produced only two basic social systems for giving form and meaning to the great rural societies which have dominated world history until recent times and to the rural portions of those societies in which the urban pattern of living has gained the ascendancy. One of these highly integrated social systems or entities has the large landed estate as its core and principal determinant; and the other has the family-sized farm as the central component and moving force of the complex. Each of these prime features and determinants, in turn, gives rise to and perpetuates a series of other significant components or characteristics, all of which contrast sharply with their counterparts in the opposing or competing system. Thus the large landed estate, with its close association with slavery, feudalism, peonage, and

all other types of servile and semi-servile status for the masses of the families involved in the system to which it gives rise, inevitably produces other social and economic correlates. These include: (i) a two-class society, with a small élite at the upper extreme and a huge mass of impoverished, largely dependent people at the other, the two being separated by a vast void in all parts of the range that would correspond to middle-class status; (ii) a low degree of vertical social mobility; (iii) an overwhelmingly strong tendency for social position to be inherited (the predominant importance of caste); (iv) low average levels of intelligence among the population; (v) limited development of the personalities of the masses; (vi) social relationships of the "order and obey" type, or in other words domination by the élite and rigid subordination of the masses; (vii) great value placed upon routine, with the workers compelled to adhere strictly to the performance of a limited number of tasks in the manner prescribed by the omnipresent "driver", overseer, or *mayordomo*; (viii) low average levels and standards of living; (ix) the omnipresent obsession that manual labour is bemeaning and degrading; and (x) slight stimulus to the development of regular work habits and little stimulus towards or reward for habits of thrift and saving.

Quite the opposite are the basic characteristics of the social system which is brought into being and perpetuated in a rural society in which farms of substantial size are operated by the great majority of all the families who depend directly upon agriculture for their livelihood. In such a social system almost the entire rural population enjoys a middle-class social status, few or no families at all can claim an aristocratic standing and there are comparatively few if any persons who by the accident of birth are condemned to a lifetime of poverty, insecurity and general inferiority. In such a rural social system the moderate social gradations which are present within the middle-class strata preclude the development of caste to any considerable extent, while at the same time there is an intense vertical social circulation up and down the limited social scale, so that each individual tends to rise or sink to the level that is most in accord with his own personal abilities, potentialities and efforts. Children born within such a social system are conditioned almost from birth in ways which prepare them to perform simultaneously the roles of manager, proprietor and manual labourer, with the result that well-rounded personalities are developed and the average level of intelligence (or the ability to adapt to new situations) becomes very high. Where family-sized farms are the moving force in a rural society, persuasion, leadership and voluntary co-operation stand out (in contrast to the patterns of order-and-obey, domination and subordination and caciquism which prevail where plantations and other large estates monopolise the land). Competition for excellence in the performance of farm tasks, the improvement of techniques and implements, the amounts and qualities of products, and so on, gives zest to rural life in the family-sized

farming districts and results in miracles of production and distribution. Especially worthy of consideration is the fact that of the billions of agriculturists who have peopled the earth, and even the billions that have lived on the land during the past two centuries, only among the few millions, the handful, of farmers who have been so fortunate as to populate the family-sized farming areas of Western Europe, the United States and Canada, are to be found the inventors and perfecters of almost all of the agricultural implements and machines which now make possible the most highly efficient and productive systems of agriculture the world has ever known.<sup>1</sup> In such a middle-class social system, of course, the search for improvement and change stands in sharp contrast to the emphasis upon routine in the other. Likewise the high average levels and standards of living, the insistence that work with the hands is honourable and uplifting, and the habits of thrift and saving, which characterise the rural social system that has family-sized farms at its core, give a rich form and substance to rural living that is forever lacking when large-scale agriculture and the two-class system it engenders are permitted to determine the pattern of life in the countryside.

That the dominant social system throughout rural Latin America has been and continues to be the one based upon great landholdings is well known. Likewise it is hardly necessary to document the continued importance of many of its features such as the two-class system, the princely positions of the large landowners, and the value systems which supply consistency to the social system involved and give ethical rightness and sanction to the behaviour patterns of the members of the upper class and to the relationships of domination and subordination between master and man. But these features are precisely those that would suddenly come to be considered as archaic, feudalistic and intolerable as Latin American societies were thrust into intimate contact with those of Western Europe and the United States following the close of the Second World War. For example, one of the most brilliant Brazilians of all time, responsible during the Vargas régime for drafting the bulk of Brazil's

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<sup>1</sup> For the role of the family-sized farms in the development and perfecting of agricultural implements and machines see T. Lynn SMITH: "El desarrollo de unidades agrícolas medianas", in *Boletín uruguayo de sociología*, Vol. I, No. 2, 1961, pp. 39-47. The major exception to the general responsibility of family-sized farming systems for the development of agricultural machinery of all types is, of course, the basic role played in recent decades by agricultural engineers and their associates at agricultural experiment stations. However, to an overwhelming degree these experiment stations themselves have developed and progressed as a function of the family-sized farming areas of a very limited extent of the earth's surface. Indeed, with minor exceptions, there are still no tractors, ploughs, disks, harrows, combines, milking machines, hay loaders, cream separators, and so on, that were developed in and for plantations and other large estates; when these large-scale farms become mechanised, which still has happened to only a small part of those that prevail throughout the world, it is by the adoption and use of large numbers of the pieces of equipment that were perfected in family-sized farming social systems, and not by the application of implements and machines which had their origin and development in systems of large estates, that is in societies in which the bulk of the farm population is confined to the status of agricultural labourers.

labour legislation, a man fully attuned to the thinking of his contemporaries, could voice praises of the latifundium such as the following, in volumes that went through edition after edition in the 1930s and 1940s:

... we have been from the beginning a nation of latifundia: among us the history of the small farm can be said to go back only a century. All the long colonial period was one of the splendour of the immense landed estate. In this period it alone appeared and shone; it alone created and dominated; it is the central theme interwoven throughout the entire drama of our history for three hundred fecund and glorious years.<sup>1</sup>

But today, only a few decades later, one will seek in vain for any publication by a Latin American of any intellectual standing which glorifies the large estate. Universally *latifundio* and *latifundista* are terms of opprobrium. Nowadays one encounters on every hand the most severe denunciations of the large plantations. A brief extract from one recent example will suffice. In his attempt to gain understanding of and sympathy for the 1964 revolution which ousted President Goulart and brought President Humberto Castelo Branco to power, the dean of Brazilian social scientists and writers, himself one who had glorified the old-style sugar-cane plantation in his classic *Casa Grande e Senzala*, had the following to say:

In some areas, such as in the sugar-cane plantation districts, the land serves only to provide what it can for industry, with the most archaic and anti-economic methods of production, by means of a poorly paid agrarian labour force and a rural population held as pariahs by the landowners. Not a few of these proprietors are absentees from the land which they have long owned and have little contact with their semi-serfs, who live, it is well to repeat, in the condition of pariahs, while the urban workers and also the employees of commercial establishments and banks and the public employees in the cities during recent decades have benefited from the legislation protecting labour and promoting social welfare. It was a situation in which the greater part of the rural population of Brazil was used on the rudest work on plantations and farms, on the estates of men with a mentality quite different from that which years ago characterised the relations between the landowners and their labourers, when the former really were, most of them, a rural gentry: not only proprietors deeply attached to their estates but masters attentive to the needs of their workers in accordance with the patriarchal forms of association.<sup>2</sup>

In the last analysis, it is the change in values, of which this example is representative, that is chiefly responsible for the fact that the recent sudden outburst of concern about agrarian reform throughout Latin America came when it did.

### **Indicators of the need for agrarian reform**

From time to time the present writer has drawn upon his knowledge of Latin American societies and social movements in an endeavour to

<sup>1</sup> F. J. OLIVEIRA VIANNA: "O povo brasileiro e sua evolução", in *Recenseamento do Brasil, 1920*, Vol. I (Rio de Janeiro, Imprensa Nacional, 1922), p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Gilberto FREYRE: "La lucha no es de clases", in *Life en Español*, 11 May 1964, pp. 25-26.



set forth the reasons why leaders throughout the various countries consider agrarian reform as absolutely essential. The list thus derived of specific indicators of this need always includes such items as the following: (i) *latifundismo*, or the prevalence of immense tracts of unused or poorly utilised land, estates that not infrequently are deliberately withheld from productive purposes; and, closely associated with this, *minifundismo*, or the proliferation of minute subsistence tracts, far too small to provide for the modest needs of the humble families which own or rent them; (ii) any high concentration of ownership and control of the land even though the units of production may be large commercial plantations; (iii) high proportions of farm labourers in the agricultural population; (iv) low production per worker; (v) low average levels and standards of living; (vi) widespread illiteracy, malnutrition and poor health among rural people generally; and (vii) a high degree of social stratification, or the existence of the two-class system discussed above.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, though, the need for agrarian reform has never been stated more eloquently than it was by President Alfonso Lopez of Colombia on 24 July 1935 in a message to Colombia's Congress. This was in defence of his Government's early programme for improving the conditions of those who worked the land. Consider the following few extracts from that message:

In dealing with these landowners the Government intends to follow no policy other than that of insuring favourable and humanitarian conditions for the working class—day labourers, "renters", and peons—and of preventing the continuance of certain feudal forms in the labour contracts and in the relationships between the owners of the land and the workers. . . . There are still regions in Colombia in which the *campesino*, day labourer or "renter", not only lacks guarantees and security in his work but must endure systems of punishment and contributions imposed by individuals, contrary to the provisions of our laws. . . .

The security of the hired labourer should be no less concern to the State than that of security of private property. . . . If the agricultural proprietors and operators find it to their advantage to be governed merely by the law of supply and demand in the labour market, being free to employ cheap hands and dismiss the more costly ones, they must accept the consequences of this mechanical economy with all its excesses. The miserable, uprooted, wandering masses who go about from one place to another in search of work, without finding it on favourable conditions, will always be disposed to listen to the voices of the agitators who play upon their instinctive desires for usurpation and awaken them to the unjust contrast between their economic condition and that of the landowners. The *campesinos* seek stability, not revolution. They aspire to have a plot of land of their own, where they can rear a family without fear of having to return to vagabondage and misery. The proprietor can give it and he does so in the majority of cases; but he cannot resign himself to being deprived of the feudal and supreme right to take it back again, to destroy it if he wishes, to destroy the results of years of toil, even though he must pay for doing so. The bad feeling and the disturbances which some time ago appeared on some large coffee

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. SMITH, op. cit., passim; and idem: *Current social trends and problems in Latin America*, Latin American Monographs No. 1 (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1957), pp. 30-34.

plantations were born of similar causes. Before the eyes of the workers whom the master had dismissed were burned the huts that had been erected under such difficulties by the "renters" and their families, and the excessive cruelty of this act of dispossession was not mitigated by the fact that they had been paid for their improvements.<sup>1</sup>

If space permitted, it would be possible to present other lucid and informative excerpts from the works of Latin America's leaders to elaborate upon each of the other indicators enumerated above. It does seem essential, though, to give the list that was prepared by Gustavo Corção, one of the most noted writers in Brazil's lay Roman Catholic group, for a 1961 conference on agrarian reform in Brazil. The 11 items in this list are: (a) a high proportion of illiterates and the consequent general lack of culture; (b) poor sanitary conditions and high indices of mortality; (c) low agricultural production and overpopulation; (d) low levels of marriage and family organisation; (e) an extremely low rate or even absence of technical progress; (f) the destruction of the soil and, in general, the poor use of the land; (g) defective distribution of land ownership; (h) serious smothering of the civic consciousness because of the debility of municipal [county] life and, secondarily, because of the general weakness of democratic life; (i) lack of leadership; (j) a low degree of vertical social mobility and a high degree of geographic mobility; (k) technical and legal deficiencies in the registration of titles to the land.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it seems essential to mention that most of the 16 paragraphs in the introductory section of Cuba's Executive Order of 17 May 1959 state that country's need for agrarian reform in terms of the indicators that have been given above. This order declares that "it has become urgently necessary to rescue the great majority of the rural population of Cuba from the state of poverty in which it has traditionally struggled"; that in Cuban agriculture "frequent use is made of the sharecropping agreement and the system of ground rents"; that "the great majority of the farms now being cultivated are being worked by persons who do not own the land"; that in the agricultural census "the extreme and undesirable concentration of land ownership in a few hands also became evident . . . 1.5 per cent. of the owners possess more than 46 per cent. of all the farm land in the country . . . some owners possess several very large farms"; that "70 per cent. of the farms occupy less than 12 per cent. of the nation's farm land"; that in large farms "there is a detrimental failure to utilise the natural resources"; and that "it is unanimously agreed that the existence of large landholdings . . . not only runs counter to the modern concept of social justice but constitutes one of the factors

<sup>1</sup> The text of the presidential message translated here is given in Marco A. MARTÍNEZ: *Régimen de tierras en Colombia*, Vol. I (Bogotá, Mundo al Día, 1939), pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> "Conceituação da reforma agrária", presented to the Symposium on Agrarian Reform organised by the Instituto Brasileiro de Ação Democrática, Rio de Janeiro, 17-22 April 1961 (mimeographed). For a report on the proceedings of this symposium see Ríos, *op. cit.*

that shape the underdeveloped, dependent structure of the Cuban economy".<sup>1</sup>

### **The objectives of agrarian reform**

More than a century ago A. P. Figueiredo of Recife, Brazil, stated lucidly and succinctly the proposition that now figures to an overwhelming degree as the basic objective of agrarian reform in the various countries of Latin America. After describing in detail the conditions prevailing on the estates of the "modern feudal barons" of north-eastern Brazil, he indicated that "for such a state of affairs there are only two effective remedies: the first is a return to the old forms of absolute government, which invests the central power with extraordinary control; and the second is to create immediately, at the expense of current feudalism, a middle class that will permit the constitutional government to proceed normally". But, continues Figueiredo, "we would never recommend, in order to correct a temporary problem, the restoration of those ancient obstacles, whose destruction has cost rivers of blood of all civilised peoples. Therefore it is necessary to resort to the second alternative, which is the creation of a middle class".<sup>2</sup> Since 1950 this basic objective of creating a rural middle social class composed of the operators of family-sized farms has gained legal expression in most of the Latin American countries that have put agrarian reform laws into effect, and it figures in the proposals and projects for legislation in most of those that have not yet acted.

Thus in Colombia article 50 of the Agrarian Social Reform Act (No. 135 of 1961) states that: "In its colonisation projects as well as in those involving the subdivision of estates and the consolidation of small parcels, the Institute [the official agency created to administer the agrarian reform programme] shall seek preferentially the creation of 'family-sized farms'." Moreover, this law specified that the family-sized farm "must fulfil the following conditions: (a) that the size of the tract . . . shall be sufficient, if utilised with a reasonable degree of efficiency, to provide to a normal family an income sufficient to cover its living expenses, to meet the payments on the purchase or improvement of the land, if this is involved, and to permit the progressive improvement of the dwelling, the farming equipment, and the general level of living; (b) that the said size normally shall not require for its use with reasonable efficiency more labour than that of the proprietor and his family".<sup>3</sup>

Essentially the same basic objectives are being sought in Venezuela, where the programme of agrarian reform is already benefiting by several

<sup>1</sup> See *Land reform law* (Havana, Office of the Prime Minister, 1961), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> A. P. FIGUEIREDO: "Pernambuco: revista retrospectiva", in *O Progresso* (Recife), Vol. I, 1846, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup> See *Carta agraria* (Bogotá, Caja de Crédito Agrario), No. 81, Jan. 1962, annex.

years of fruitful experience. The 1960 Venezuelan *Ley de Reforma Agraria* in article 2, paragraph *b*, "guarantees the right of every individual or group of people who are suited to work in agriculture or stockraising and who lack land or have insufficient amounts of it to be given the ownership of lands that are suited for economic utilisation", and paragraph *e* of the same article guarantees "to favour and protect in a special way the development of the small and medium-sized rural properties and the agricultural co-operatives so that they shall come to be stable and efficient. For this purpose, the right of the small family-sized farm is established in accordance with the norms relative to gratuitous grants contained in this Law".<sup>1</sup>

Equally specific are the stated objectives of the more important and influential of the Brazilian groups who have struggled with the basic problems of agrarian reform in that huge and extremely heterogeneous country. One of these, after a week of intensive discussion and study, stated explicitly that "agrarian reform is not essentially a change in the régime of property, although it cannot be accomplished without such a change". Rather, because it "seeks the creation of a rural middle class, an agrarian reform should place major emphasis upon a régime of properties distributed in accordance with this criterion".<sup>2</sup>

Bolivian formulations of the objectives of agrarian reform have been complicated to a considerable extent because the problems of the relationships of man to the land are intertwined with those relating to the huge Indian population and also by the largely *ex post facto* nature of her agrarian reform. Nevertheless the essentials have been expressed by José Flores Moncayo as follows: "Fundamentally the agrarian reform proposes to elevate the levels of the indigenous [Indian] economy so as to liberate the country from illiteracy, poverty and fear; to place within the reach of the Indian the right to property which will add to the personality of the human being, giving him opportunities to shape his own destiny within the social order"; and "it was necessary to adjudicate the rights of ownership to the Bolivian *campesinos* because merely to concede to them the use of the land would have been to sanction the uncertain and precarious tenancy which was used by the *latifundistas* to destroy their landholding traditions."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the stated objectives of the "new phase" of agrarian reform in Mexico are the most important expressions of the determination throughout Latin America to develop and strengthen a rural middle class composed of the operators of family-sized farms. These are based upon the experience of half a century in dealing with the realities of reform endeavours. One of the most authoritative statements of such objectives

<sup>1</sup> *Ley de reforma agraria* (Caracas, Publicaciones Nacionales, 1960), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ríos, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

<sup>3</sup> JOSÉ FLORES MONCAYO: *Derecho agrario boliviano* (La Paz, Editorial Don Bosco, 1956), pp. 234-236.

is to be found in a recent brochure by Victor Manzanilla Schaffer of the national agency responsible for Mexico's on-going programme of improvement in the social relationships of man to the land. Briefly, those at present in charge of directing Mexico's activities expect that "through the attainment of the objectives set forth a complete social transformation of our country will be accomplished with the elevation of the masses of our population into middle-class producers and consumers".<sup>1</sup>

### **The techniques of agrarian reform**

If the various Latin American countries achieve the major stated objectives of their agrarian reform laws and projects, they will necessarily have to devise and put into effect a wide range of specific techniques and measures that will produce: (1) a much broader distribution of the ownership and control of the land; (2) the substitution of modern, efficient and productive ways of getting products from the soil for the labour-devouring, ineffective and frequently bemeaning methods at present widely in use, and especially the revision of prevailing systems of farm management, so as to increase greatly the input of management in the average farm enterprise; and (3) the development of comprehensive and realistic programmes of community development, including substantial local concern with, financial support for, and administration of, schools, health programmes, services for the protection of life and property, the construction of local roads and bridges, agricultural extension activities and farm credit facilities, and so forth.

It is unlikely, though, that any of these, except the first, will receive any substantial place in the agrarian reform programmes of most of the countries in the near future. Therefore, for all practical purposes, the techniques of agrarian reform of immediate concern are those having to do with the redistribution of property rights to the land. Such measures, though, require specific means for national governments (or in Brazil, the state governments) to regain their rights to substantial portions of the land that has been alienated, for it would be deceptive to maintain that adequate agrarian reform measures could be put into effect merely by operations on the public domains presently in existence. Even in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and other countries in which there still exist huge expanses of unoccupied territory, genuine agrarian reform will require substantial changes in the areas presently settled. Therefore, the utmost importance is to be attached to the ways in which the State regains the title to substantial parts of the arable and pasture lands within its limits. These in turn are of considerable variety.

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<sup>1</sup> MANZANILLA SCHAFFER, *op. cit.*, p. 73; see also FERNÁNDEZ Y FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-220.

#### CONFISCATION

The confiscation of the lands which members of a ruling clique had gathered into their hands during a long period in which they held power has supplied some of the countries with extensive portions of the most fertile and best-located land for use in their national programmes; and the seizure of estates owned by foreign interests has provided large acreages for similar use in others. In still others, if the constitutions are modified to provide that payments for lands expropriated may be made with "long-term, low interest, non-negotiable bonds", as is sometimes proposed, the galloping inflation rampant in some of these countries may make "expropriation" in them tantamount to confiscation.

#### EXPROPRIATION

Most Latin American leaders consider expropriation, as exemplified in the laws and agrarian reform projects, to be the chief way in which the State will secure the ownership of the land that is used in the programmes. There is, however, considerable disagreement with respect to the legal bases for expropriation, and the manner of paying for the land that is taken. All aspects of this subject are greatly complicated by the rampant inflation that is almost chronic in many of the countries. Rarely in practice or theory does full remuneration at cash or market values figure in the programmes and proposals; it is much more common to make use of some percentage of the value, generally greatly understated, at which the property has been returned for tax purposes. In Mexico a doctrine of "unaffectability" has prevailed, which is highly pertinent to the topic of expropriation. In brief it exempts from expropriation certain portions of the landed estates, segments selected by the landowners themselves. However, at the present time serious consideration is being given to substantial modifications in this policy<sup>1</sup>; and there seems to be no tendency in other countries to adopt the doctrine. If a substantial tax were placed upon land in the various Latin American countries and the proceeds used to support the educational, health and other programmes that are so badly needed, the value of the land would be reduced considerably, perhaps to a ratio to its productivity more nearly comparable with that which prevails throughout Europe, the United States and Canada. This, in turn, would make the problem of financing agricultural reform measures through expropriation very much less difficult than it actually is.

#### LIMITS TO THE AMOUNT OF LAND THAT MAY BE OWNED

In Europe, Asia and parts of Africa the placing of ceilings upon the amount of land that may be owned by one individual or one family is

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<sup>1</sup> MANZANILLA SCHAFER, *op. cit.*, *passim*; and FERNÁNDEZ Y FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

one of the principal instruments of various agrarian reform programmes. The same device under the name of "the 500-acre limitation" is one of the chief features of Puerto Rico's endeavours. Among the 20 Latin American countries, however, little or no attention has been given to this possibility; and at present there is little evidence that it will figure to any extent in the future.

The principal device Latin Americans are using in their efforts to increase the number and to strengthen the position of middle-class operators of family-sized farms in the various countries is the establishment of highly supervised and minutely directed groups of agriculturists on segments of what once were large estates. These groups are very costly in relation to the number of families benefited. In addition, it seems to be difficult to get any substantial part of the managerial functions actually transferred from the personnel in charge of the projects to the farmers themselves. The present writer does not expect any comprehensive results to come from the multiplicity of colonisation projects presently in operation or being planned and presently monopolising the funds expended on agrarian reform programmes.

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In conclusion, perhaps it may be justifiable to mention briefly three specific measures for agrarian reform in Latin America which seem greatly needed but to which, at the present time, there seems little likelihood that any particular attention will be given. The first of these is the adoption of a system of surveys of the remaining public domain that will result in property lines that are definite, determinate and permanent. Many of the Latin American countries need ways and means of bringing method and order into the occupation of the public domain, and the adoption of such a system could form a highly important part of a genuine agrarian reform programme.<sup>1</sup>

The second is a suggestion so prosaic in nature that it is generally passed by with complete disdain, to say the least. Nevertheless the present writer continues to insist upon its importance for use in the United States and, especially, throughout Latin America. It requires merely the establishment of an agency that would acquire the ownership of large estates when they are for sale and then resell the land in tracts of from about 25 to 200 hectares in size to persons who have the funds or the credit to pay for a family-sized farm.

The third and final suggestion or recommendation is the imposition of a substantial tax upon land, with the proceeds going to pay the costs of

<sup>1</sup> On this point consult T. Lynn SMITH: *The sociology of rural life*, 3rd ed. (New York, Harper, 1953), Ch. 11; idem: *Brazil: People and institutions*, 3rd ed. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1963), Ch. 12; idem: *Sociologia rural* (Maracaibo, Universidad del Zulia, 1963), pp. 89-93.

local governmental activities such as elementary and secondary education, health and welfare programmes, the protection of life and property, and the construction and maintenance of local roads, trails and bridges. In addition to solving once and for all the problems of *latifundismo*, or of large, slightly used or entirely idle expanses of land, and the widespread tendency for land to be an asylum for capital, such a measure could help immensely in the solution of most of the other problems of comprehensive agrarian reform. Indeed, if properly planned so as to make use of the principle of homestead exemption and graduated rates, and if used in conjunction with a comprehensive plan of supervised farm credit and other features of an adequate agricultural extension service, it could within a decade exert a profound influence upon all facets of life and labour throughout the rural districts of Latin America.

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