

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FMF-16 Chile's Agrarian Reform: Its Operation

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New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

"For some it is a synonym for plunder, and outrage against the most elementary human rights, a demagoguery, a 'sovietization'. For others it represents only the first step in a grand revolutionary process to correct, at long last, injustices which 'shout to the heavens'. There are those who criticize it for being too timid or too bold, for going too far or for being a compromise. But for every Chilean, whether he approves it or opposes it, the Agrarian Reform is a reality: the topic of forums and controversies, editorials and polls, street debates and discussions in the home.

"The image of this process has replaced the idyllic scenes on calendars and school stamps: huasos dancing the cuenca with young girls of dark tresses, little houses surrounded by poplars and willows, fields and vineyards stretching to a horizon of snow-capped volcanoes. Now, instead of innocent picture-postcard landscapes, 'campo' signifies sta-

Below, Chilean huasos:



tistical graphs, columns of figures, calculations and percentages."

Chile's agrarian reform was so described in a late May 1968 issue of Ercilla, a leading newsmagazine. It suggests the maze of crosscurrents, counterforces and contradictions which characterize the situation at this time. The opposition has by no means acceded to the reform, and they apply a myriad methods, overt and covert, to alter and frustrate it. The implementors are carrying out a program without precedent and, therefore, are in some cases groping for proper solutions to unforeseen problems. The peasants are not a neutral, malleable element—they, too, have their own ambitions, expectations, criticisms; their responses are as diverse as the urban congeries which, happily or unhappily, sired the agrarian reform. President Frei has been in office three and a half years; the enabling act was passed only a year ago for a program which proposes to change the whole agrarian structure. Yet, already it is being adjudged harshly as a failure on one or all of economic, social and political counts. Its defenders are forced to muster figures and demonstrations to prove its success before either the accounts or the achievements are more than penciled hypotheses. A reform to correct the ills of four centuries will come under increasing scrutiny and attack as the campaign intensifies for the critical congressional and presidential elections in 1969 and 1970. The program cannot, therefore, proceed at a natural pace but must accelerate, pell-mell, in order to prove itself and implant itself so firmly in the system and society that it cannot be wrenched out by political or budgetary vicissitudes.

In cold ciphers, the expropriating agency (Corporación de la Reforma Agraria, CORA) had taken over 645 farms totaling over 308 million acres as of June 1968. Residents on this land number some 10,000 families or an estimated 70,000 people (approximately 9000 of this number have been settled as asentados, i.e., residents on asentamientos as described on p. 3). The original goal set by the Government for the period 1965-1970 was to benefit 100,000 campesino families by the reform; because of the decision to give a relatively high level of financial and technical assistance and because of various delays, particularly in passing the law, the goal was reduced to 40,000-60,000 families.

CORA has two principal roles: expropriation of land and water resources and supervision of the subsequent asentamientos. Rural property subject to expropriation is defined in a series of 14 articles within Law No. 16,640, but the two most far-reaching conditions are:

- 1) "rural properties owned by an individual, whatever their location in the national territory and the classes of their lands, are liable to expropriation when, singly or together, they encompass an area which exceeds 80 basic hectares (approximately 200 acres), calculated according to the Conversion Table in Art. 172" (a detailed tabulation of hectare equivalency throughout the country to be determined by multiplying by a given coefficient), and
- 2) "rural properties that are found to be abandoned and those that are poorly exploited are liable to expropriation."

In general, the procedure adopted by CORA to determine the fate of abandoned or poorly exploited properties consists of two consecutive appraisals by staff agronomists who walk the farm, grading it on the basis of a formulized point system, each without knowledge of the others judgment. On 15 May 1968 a decree by the Ministry of Agriculture made public the regulations establishing the qualifications for a property to be judged "not badly exploited". A maximum of 600 points may be awarded for technical and economic factors which include the utilization of natural resources (for instance, maintenance and efficiency of the irrigation system, conservation and optimization of the soils), general administrative practices (such as control of weeds and insects, use of improved seeds and improved forage). A maximum of 400 points may be awarded for social factors which include the housing and sanitary conditions, remuneration, fulfillment of the social laws, and the educational level. If the property receives less than a total of 500 points, or falls below 300 points in the technical-economic category or 200 points in the social category, it is classified as poorly exploited and, therefore, becomes subject to expropriation.

In the case of farms larger than 80 basic hectares or its equivalent, expropriation is, legally, inevitable, but the owner may on his own initiative subdivide the land by selling it to peasant families, according to detailed regulations issued by the Ministry of Agriculture. In this case, the new owners must form a cooperative but bypass the transitory phase of the asentamiento.

When CORA acts to expropriate property in accordance with Title I of the Agrarian Reform Law, it must fulfill a number of preliminary obligations which assure the expropriated of proper notice and legal procedure. This includes such measures as delivery of an authorized copy of the expropriation decree to the responsible party attached to the property, publication of an abstract of the decree in the Diario Oficial and in a local newspaper, registration in the office of the Conservator of Real Estate, deposit of the proper indemnification with the provincial Civil Court Judge, etc. Should CORA's appraisal of the property value be disputed or any of the steps set forth by the law be omitted, the injured party has recourse first to the provincial Agrarian Tribunals and, by appeal, to the Supreme Court. In the meantime, however, CORA may take possession of the farm and proceed to organize the prerequisite asentamiento.

According to legal definition, the "campesino asentamiento" is "the initial transitory stage in the social and economic organization of the campesinos, in which land expropriated by the Agrarian Reform Corporation (CORA) is operated, during the intermediate period between the physical taking of possession of the land, until such land is allotted to them...

"Its primary basic objectives are those indicated here below:

"1) The efficient exploitation of the land formed by the asentamiento, improving production through assistance lent or contributed by

the Agrarian Reform Corporation (CORA).

"2) To train and capacitate asentados in order that they may be able, when the asentamiento period terminates, to assume the responsibilities of owners and agricultural entrepreneurs.

"3) To orient and promote community development, promoting the preparation, establishment and strengthening of the cooperatives and base organizations.

"4) To promote the capitalization of the asentados, procuring that a large part of the income obtained be invested primarily for such objectives.

"5) Build the minimum infrastructure necessary for the development of family and community life of the asentados and of future assignees, as well as the necessary infrastructure for the normal present and future exploitation of the land."

Normally, the asentamiento lasts three years and only in exceptional cases may the President of the Republic extend this period for up to two more years. At the end of this transitory stage, the asentado will be granted title in one of three forms: 1) in individual ownership, 2) in exclusive ownership to cooperatives, or 3) in mixed or joint title combining individual and cooperative ownership. Most of the asentados are former inquilinos (resident laborers on the fundos) since the law gives priority to those who had worked permanently in the rural property for at least three of the last four years prior to the date of the expropriation decree.

Among the several asentamientos I have visited, one of the most successful—economically, socially and politically—is La Unión Chilena, located near Curacaví, about half way between Santiago and Valparaíso. It was early April, harvest season terminating for melons and in full course for corn. Once outside of Santiago, the Central Zone sparkles in the clear air and bright sun of the fall. The countryside is a patchwork of green and gold: at La Unión Chilena, ears of corn spread across the yard to dry, husks piled high in disarray, gilded rows of poplars against the blue sky.

Twenty-six families occupy the asentamiento, their heads composing the Committee of the Asentamiento which had elected Don Agustín Calderón as its president. He, as the others, had been an inquilino on the fundo before it was expropriated because of size just a year before. An expansive, self-confident man, Don Agustín combines something of the wiles of a Machiavelli hero with the mannerism of Sancho Panza. Whatever the components of his leadership, they have been effective in motivating all members of the asentamiento to contribute unstintingly of time and energy to make it a success. Impressive results had just been chalked up in the books at the close of the watermelon season—100,000 sold at an average of two escudos each (20-25 cents). Now in the corn fields men swathed through the tall stalks, shucking



To the left:  
Don Agustín

Below: The  
Corn Harvest at  
La Unión Chilena



the large ears. Pulled by tractor and trailer or truck (all owned cooperatively and purchased through CORA on an installment plan), the harvest was dumped at the front of the asentamientos where men, women and children stripped the husks.

"We considered doing this by machine," explained Don Agustín, "but we decided that would be foolish since we have enough people to do it manually."

The former owner of the asentamiento land still holds his reserve across the road. He and Don Agustín glower at each other, literally and figuratively.

"We should have that land," said Don Agustín with a sweep of the arm toward the fundo. "Look at all those fields with only natural pasture and a few head of cattle---we could put crops there and really make it produce. And there at the wet foot of the sierra where he has nothing, we could get big yields. And we would plant eucalyptus up the slopes where now there is only erosion."

Once again Don Agustín pressed Claudio Barriga, CORA's area chief, to champion the asentados' cause. Once again Claudio explained patiently that by the established point system it had been determined that the fundo could not be expropriated, even though he agreed that the asentados could probably do a better job with the land.

Economically, La Unión Chilena has been a success even in its first year. Socially, it has proved the peasant's capacity for self-direction and organization; it has demonstrated his ability to work cooperatively with his peers to better utilize the soil and improve his own standards. Politically, the asentados are organized not only as a committee to run their own affairs, but also as a syndicate to bring their demands to bear at a regional and national level. Observers predict that some day Don Agustín will be a Deputy in the National Congress.

At Las Mercedes, another asentamiento in the Central Zone, things are good but not quite so good as at La Unión Chilena. The fundo was expropriated in toto in January 1967 because it was poorly exploited. The owner was not an agriculturalist but a wine dealer and, though the fundo had 865 acres of vineyard, it was badly tended; the owner felt it advantageous to pretend to be a producer, but he preferred to buy cheap wines from others.

Though the law states that expropriation should take place after the harvest and before the next planting---for grapes, late April or May---CORA was able to take Las Mercedes in January with the owner's consent, agreeing to turn over to him the proceeds of that year's harvest. Thus, the asentados could start immediately to till and fertilize the land, repair the trellis-work and tie up the fallen vines. Also with CORA technicians and loans, they repaired the press and vats. In addition to improving conditions for the next

grape harvest, the asentados planted corn and wheat on a large part of another 500 acres which previously lay fallow.

At the time of my mid-April visit to Las Mercedes, the last of the grapes were coming from the vineyards, and the peasant leaders smiled as they told of the two-million litre production---86% over the previous year.

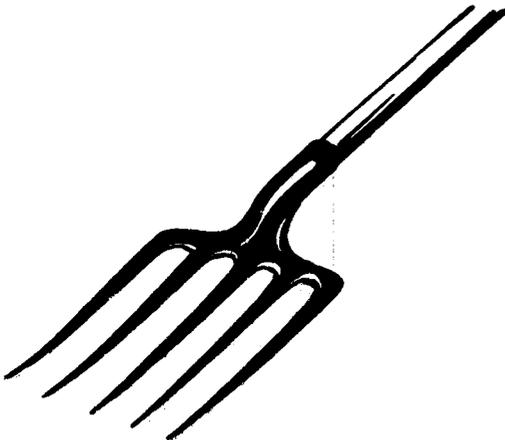
In the fields members of the 50 asentado families and the hired labor necessary at this season worked as pairs, one on each side of the long rows, clipping the bunches rapidly. At the bodega the grapes were squeezed by machine and the juice piped into caldrons where the temperature was closely controlled so as not to damage the yeast of fermentation. Thence it flowed into the man-dwarfing wooden vats, holding 42000 litres each, where with age the opaque liquid becomes a clear Chilean wine. When the must is at that delicate edge of fermentation, it brings great joy to the man-on-the-street as the national drink, called chicha. At Las Mercedes this piquant beverage is ladled into large tumblers in hospitality to all visitors.

By their own decision the asentados had contracted a viticulturist ---Dr. Chacón, an agronomist and professor at the University of Chile. Making the rounds of the several vineyards which he advised, he had just arrived at Las Mercedes at the time of my visit. The peasant leaders chatted with him informally and plied him with technical questions. Pleased with the year's yield, he advised them that they could further increase their profit by investing in equipment to bottle the wine. Thus they could sell directly to retailers and so avoid certain middlemen and taxes. They agreed among themselves to set up a committee, to include the resident CORA technician, which would gather data on the costs and savings of such an endeavor and recommend if it would be advisable.

At Las Mercedes, as at all the asentamientos, the executive power is vested in the Administrative Council, composed of five asentados and two representatives of CORA. Its five campesino members are elected by the assembled asentados and serve for one year. Don Raúl Figueroa was just completing his second term as president, the elections coinciding with the festivities celebrating the termination of the grape harvest.

Though short in stature, Don Raúl's wiry build suggests great physical strength. His manner was relaxed, self-assured, almost bordering cockiness. Wearing the typical flat-crowned straw hat of the Chilean countryside, he tilted it jauntily over brown wavy hair and angular face, deeply sun-tanned. His denim trousers, with pocket corners ripped, were tucked into knee-high rubber boots. A shirt collar stuck out awry from the neck of a brown wool sweater.

He spoke that special Chilean language which, though called Spanish, has its own vocabulary and syntax and elides a series of consonants such as "d", "s", "l", "t", etc. Still I managed to understand that he



had been an inquilino on Las Mercedes when it was a fundo, having the use of a modest house and a little over half an acre on which he raised his own potatoes and beans. In return, he was obliged to provide the fundo with his own labor or an alternate's. In addition, he was a contratista, responsible for about 12 acres of the vineyard, the income from which he divided with the owner. His parents had been inquilinos in southern Chile, as had his grandparents. Now, as president at Las Mercedes, he was in charge of a farm of 1350 acres, valued at three million escudos (\$1:7.3).

When I asked a CORA administrator if Don Raúl had been initially awed by his new responsibilities, I was told that, to the contrary, he had verged on braggadocio. Though he was capable, he defaulted in his leadership due to excessive drinking, often absent or inebriated during the work days. This led to other charges regarding his judgments and performance of duty. Conferring among themselves, the asentados decided to take action. Don Raúl was called before a plenary session and reprimanded; he offered to resign if he was to understand that his followers had lost confidence in him. They assured him that they wanted him to continue as president, but to comport himself accordingly. A chastened Don Raúl has since fulfilled his role without transgression.

However, both because he thought two terms sufficient and because he had been elected president of another agrarian reform group outside the asentamiento, Don Raúl did not present himself for reelection this year. In 1967 there had been 10 candidates; this year there were 14. Since many of the asentados are illiterate, the vote is carried out by emblem rather than by name. Each candidate pinned upon himself a drawing of an object: a tea kettle, a bunch of grapes, a pitchfork, a star, etc. Ballots bore the same representations, and voters dropped the emblem of their choice into the box.

Don Andrés Gonzalez, the padlock,

was the victor. On the festival day, May 8, there was much gaiety--- a queen was elected---and reporters from the Santiago newspapers were on hand, as well as a TV film crew. Holding a "press conference" in the grove of eucalyptus alongside the bodega, Don Andrés commented:

"It is very easy to criticize and oppose the agrarian reform while sitting in Santiago, but I personally feel the real significance of this new situation when I know that now I can have shoes not only for my children, but even for my wife---new shoes, shoes bought with my own money and not used shoes which the 'patroncita' gives as a present when they are already worn out."

The asentados of Las Mercedes have a much higher income than previously and the land's yield is greatly increased. But, with 50 families, there is dissension, there are trouble-makers, and some of the men do not do their share, either truly ill or malingering.

Although profits at the end of the year are divided on the basis of number of days worked by each asentado and, therefore, those who have slacked earn less, still the asentamiento cannot support dead weight. If the assembled members so decide they may expel one of their own, with good cause; the same group has the power to replace an asentado by an outside campesino or they may increase their own number by inviting others to join the asentamiento if it has proved that it can support additional people. In fact, all major plans and decisions affecting the asentamiento are brought before a plenary assembly; although CORA functionaries have considerable influence and control, theirs is a minority representation before that of the asentados.

The Administrative Council meets once a week, convening at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. and often adjourning after midnight. The decisions to be taken are many and often difficult. Through the three years it will continue experimenting with various working arrangements. For the first year the whole of the 865-acre vineyard was cultivated communally; in the second year a section is being allotted to each family so that each will have responsibility for tending a specific area. An array of committees made up by the asentados, each one choosing its own chairman, manages the various affairs of the community: the consumer cooperative, the housing project, finances, literacy training, etc. Also ad hoc committees are formed to tend the seasonal needs: to fertilize the fields, to spray insecticide, to clean the irrigation ditches.

By the third year, the asentados of Las Mercedes must be ready to turn loose from CORA and indicate the form in which they want their titles. Since vineyard and bodega are extensive and integrated operations and since the irrigation system is engineered to water large fields, it would be uneconomic and probably inoperative to split this area into small plots. On the other hand, the remaining 500 acres could be assigned individually, if the problems of adjusting the irrigation were not too great. Therefore, logic suggests that Las Mercedes

will opt for the mixed-title alternative.

CORA withholds 5% to 25% of the asentamiento's annual profits to cover the costs of land rental, extension services, advances to cover asentados' living costs, sale of equipment, maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure, etc. The percentage varies according to the amount of CORA's costs for each asentamiento. The campesinos will continue paying off the interest-bearing mortgages on the land, house and improvements over 30 years, starting three years after they receive titles. This recuperative facility of CORA provides it with a revolving fund which assures its ability to continue acquiring new lands for distribution.

Presuming that the asentamiento makes a profit, an asentado family has two types of income. In the first place, since there is now no salary, CORA during this transitory stage advances a daily stipend, called the anticipo. The asentados themselves set the amount of this anticipo, although it must be within a reasonable range of the government-decreed minimum wage for their area. CORA sees this power of the asentados to determine their own stipend as one of the many ways to teach financial responsibility. The campesinos at Las Mercedes say they were earning three escudos a day (30-40 cents) when they were inquilinos, and now they receive 11 escudos as their anticipo. Of course, this amount is deducted from the year-end profits but, if the asentamiento earns accordingly, it does imply a considerable increase in income. Secondly, after all the deductions from the annual gross, the balance is divided among the asentados according to each one's contribution of work days.

Therefore, it is possible that a group of campesinos who have, throughout their lives, subsisted largely on payment in kind and never possessed but a pittance of cash, suddenly find themselves enjoying a considerably higher monetized income, plus a possible lump sum at the end of the fiscal year. As free agents, they may use this as they see fit; the law would hope that it would go "to promote the capitalization of the asentados, procuring that a large part of the income obtained be invested for such objectives."

But, long denied life's amenities, they naturally tend first toward personal consumption. Quality and quantity of alimentation improve almost immediately, and threadbare clothing is replaced. Chile's cold, damp winters prompt another of the early purchases: kerosene-burning heat stoves. Though the house may be ramshackle, new furniture bedecks it. One asentado housewife showed her new dining-room suite with great pride but then turned to fret about its fate when the rains came; it obviously had not occurred to the family to repair the roof before such an indulgence.

Masculine ego also enjoys its satisfaction. Though of little or no practical use amid modern mechanization, the horse maintains a subtle importance as a prestige symbol. From the very beginning of the subjugation of the aborigines by the conquistadores, arcane powers



A Show of  
Horsemanship at  
A Chilean Rodeo.

have been ascribed to the man mounted on a horse. Never having seen such a beast before, the Indians first thought man and horse were one, a superior and invincible being.

The Spanish word for "gentleman" is "caballero", derivative of "caballo", meaning "horse". The 1966 report of the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development points out:

"One of the salient characteristics of the inquilino system and of the campesino worker in general is the lack of involvement with the progress of the fundo. From this disengagement derives the dearth of initiative resulting from the absence of incentive. The precarious operation of this complicated and inert structure of labor rests upon the great number of guards and supervisors which each fundo employs.

"Among these are the camperos who carry out subordinate tasks (oversee the milking, the cleaning of the ditches, etc.) They are mounted on horseback which bestows upon them a fine difference of category from the inquilinos and hired workers."

There were many fundos where horses were forbidden except to the administrators. And the romantic tradition of the huaso is deeply rooted in the Chilean culture. Thus, the asentado, almost by sublimation, is compelled to acquire a horse to assert his new-found importance.

In addition, the purchase of a horse may confirm the epithet of "shrewd" so often applied to the peasant. The "inflation psychology", product of 80 years of spiraling costs, is known to be part and parcel of middle- and upper-class Chilean society, so surely it has percolated downward. As the wealthy man may buy real estate in the hardly speculative risk that its value will continue to climb, so the peasant turns to an investment within his means which, likewise, has proved gilt-edged.

However, reinvestment in farm improvements hold their own alongside "conspicuous consumption". The asentados may choose to put back a part of the year's gains into roads, fences or irrigation canals. Since those who are well-oriented realize that leaning on CORA's loans shrinks their net by both principal and interest, some asentados have agreed to invest their combined funds in such utilitarian items as trucks and tractors.

But not all asentados may contemplate how to spend their year-end earnings because not all the columns end up in the black. In a given sample of asentamientos, about half of them brought no earnings or a debit vis-à-vis the anticipos and other obligations undertaken throughout the year. Production had risen but so had costs so that, at the best, credits and debits cancelled each other. In the most negative case, the asentados pushed their anticipos to the ceiling and assumed heavy debts for equipment and improvements; of about 50 families, all but three ended their first year with a debt of over 10,000 escudos. Only three families held their obligations below 10,000 escudos, and CORA agreed to refinance only those three during the coming year. The others are in serious straits, fearful that CORA will seize their livestock—an unlikely move as it would only aggravate the situation.

The decision to benefit inquilinos primarily by the redistribution of land was surely based more upon practical and social, rather than economic, considerations. On the one hand, it would hardly have been practicable to have attempted to dislodge large numbers of campesinos and replace them with others, no matter how much better qualified the substitute might be. Secondly, the inquilino is the pariah of the Chilean social system, propertyless, often illiterate and at times the passive subject of an authoritarian rule which has reduced him to abulia. Of the total agricultural population, inquilinos and their families compose the largest group, 25.6%; this figure includes the inquilino-mediero

who carries out both salaried and sharecropper roles, this usually possible because he has an alternate---perhaps a son---to meet the obligation to the fundo owner. The thrust of Chile's agrarian reform is, therefore, aimed at the largest and most problematical group.

But the social structure of the Chilean countryside is much more complex. There are the small farmers, that is, those who own and themselves work just enough land to support their families. The mini-fundistas also own a plot, but not enough to provide a decent living, so they must search out supplementary jobs on nearby fundos or in cities. The arrendatarios do not own land but are sufficiently industrious to support themselves by renting land from another. The mediero is a sharecropper, often living on a fundo, but tilling the soil at his own risk and gain. At the salaried level is the administrative staff of the fundo: mayordomo, field foremen, clerical help, etc. Two types of wage-earners round out the labor structure: the voluntarios who live on the fundo but are paid only for the days when their help is needed and receive no land or house in usufruct, and the afuerinos, or migrant day workers. These diverse components represent 66.3% of the agricultural population.

A concentration of medieros (sharecroppers) and arrendatarios (renters) encircles Santiago, loading their carretelas with garden produce to supply La Vega and other city markets, as described in FMP-12. Within two weeks after the agrarian reform bill was introduced in Congress (22 November 1965), several cooperatives composed of these small farmers voiced their support and their hopes for the measure. El Mercurio summarized their views:

"They point out that they have the hand tools, the seeds, the horses and equipment for planting, as well as the technical knowledge necessary to assure success in agricultural undertakings. These modest agriculturalists, who have joined together in farmers' cooperatives, have proved that they cannot fail because, in spite of the high rents and difficult conditions, they always make a profit because they know how to till the land...they concluded saying that it is the wish of their lifetimes that they might have the security which comes with owning their own land."

However, by the Agrarian Reform Law, the attributes stated as cause for priority in the selection of assignees to expropriated land places these independent farmers far down the list. CORA, therefore, works almost exclusively with former inquilinos, and a second government agency, the Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agropecuario (INDAP), is responsible for providing credit and technical assistance to the other groups. In addition, INDAP's functions encompass the spectrum of campesinos and small farmers in its program to mobilize and organize the agricultural population so that it may participate in the social, economic and political activities of the country. In its various programs, INDAP by this time is in one way or the other reaching some 150,000 farmers.

In fact, the more significant and controversial role of both

CORA and INDAP is that of agents in promoting political socialization. They have disturbed a formerly quiescent state by their catalytic action, prompting the creation of and participation in interest groups—committees, unions, cooperatives—which operate as new forces within the society, altering the traditional social contract and establishing new patterns of behavior.

In the words of INDAP's director, Jacques Chonchol:

"The problem in the countryside, far more than training in technical matters, is to break down or, rather, replace the psychology of paternalism. In the case of many of the independent farmers, it is to overcome their rigid individualism with a spirit of cooperation. Paternalism and individualism are the two major barriers which we must combat."

At the risk of having campesinos make mistakes, the two reform agencies push them to formulate their own plans and make their own decisions. The ideal goal is to free the peasant subculture from its traditional orientations and attitudes and transform it into a dynamic, independent participant, integrated in the national society.

INDAP describes this as a three-phase operation:

1) "la toma de conciencia", that is, making the peasants aware of themselves and their situation, instilling in them a confidence that they themselves can do something about their conditions;

2) the organization of the peasants so that they may aggregate and articulate their own interests. The aim is to provide legitimate channels in the place of those described by Chonchol: "What are the political rights which the peasants have in Latin America today? Practically no other than armed rebellion and banditry."

3) the application of this effective power upon the processes of development so that the lower strata of the agricultural sector become beneficiaries in the distribution and uses of wealth, power and status.

In a controversial extension of its operation, INDAP has gone beyond its credit and technical assistance services to enter actively the field of union organization. There are two other major syndicates operating in the area, both legitimate federations which came into being in the early 60's. One is the Federación Nacional de Campesinos e Indígenas (FCI, Federation of Peasants and Indians), unquestionably of Marxist orientation and member of the Communist-Socialist controlled Confederación de Uniones de Trabajadores (CUT, Confederation of Unions of Workers). The other major organizer, the Confederación Nacional de Campesinos (CNC, National Confederation of Peasants) evolved from the pioneering syndical work of the Church; the CNC is independent but sympathetic to the Christian Democratic party.

As is the case throughout most of Latin America, the rural union

movement has historically been severely retarded due to government and landholder suppression and due to laws which, if they did not actually forbid such activity, at least constrained its operation. Peasant syndicalization was expressly proscribed in Chile until 1947. Largely due to its commitments to the International Labor Organization, the country then moved to give rural workers something of the rights bestowed upon industrial workers; but again, in that too frequent Latin American deal to leave the countryside alone, the enabling act was so structured as to hobble effective organization. Any given union could represent no more than one fundo and be composed of a minimum of 20 workers who must have worked on the fundo at least one year, who must represent at least 40% of the total labor force, and 10 of whom must know to read and write. To obtain legal recognition was a prolonged and tortuous process; to disband, quick and simple. To bargain for benefits it was first necessary to meet a number of conditions: a petition could be presented but once a year and then, not during the planting or harvest seasons, etc. The opposition's purpose was achieved: in 17 years (1947-1964) only 24 agricultural syndicates were formed, with a membership of 1,651.

Because the rural vote was largely an unexploited potential and because he championed the participation of all sectors of Chile's society, Frei waged a campaign which held strong appeals for the campesinos. Concomitant with the promise of agrarian reform was that of effective rural unionization. Even under the stringencies of the old law, 45 new unions were constituted with 2,983 members in the first year and a half of the administration. And in April 1967, a new law of "sindicalización campesina" came into effect, correcting the faults of the former law and authorizing a vigorous rural syndicate movement.

Although asentados and independent farmers are being organized, the stress is on the inquilinos who remain on fundos which will not be expropriated. The Frei administration has, therefore, legitimized programs of organization and participation to benefit the spectrum of agricultural workers. CORA prepares the asentados to be landholders, INDAP facilitates the improvement of the independent farmers' conditions, and the labor movement organizes the wage earners. In addition to being instruments of collective bargaining, the rural syndicates are conceived as yet another method of upgrading the campesino and accelerating his integration in the society; thus, they should serve as nuclei for the organization of cooperatives, technical and literary training, establishment of libraries, sponsorship of sporting and recreational activities, source of legal counsel, promotor of health centers, etc.

The rural union movement is still in its infancy and, admittedly, too closely tied to partisan politics. The FCI, dedicated as are its mentors---the Communist and Socialist parties---to the disruption of the system, sometimes damages its position by wildly excessive demands. When its members ask a 200% increase but must settle for 30%, there is reason for disillusionment. When Marxist demagoguery leads them to illegal strikes---such as that in Colchagua of a month's duration---

which deprives workers of wages without any tangible gains when they return to work, the thin pocketbook of the campesino calls into question whether the union is dedicated to bettering his condition or, rather, to serving an ideology.

Likewise, the CNC has sometimes compromised its members' cause by believing in the government's promises and by trying to accommodate the official campaign against inflation. Its leadership in the hands of stalwart Christian Democrats, the confederation's policies sometimes suffer a division of loyalty between party and union militancy.

Then, there is the double paradox of INDAP's role. Accepting the inevitability of politization, it is ironic that INDAP and CNC, both of Christian Democratic orientation, should find themselves competing for membership and, in the process, disparaging each other's positions. Then too, there is the quirk of INDAP's being an integral agency of the Government and involved in its policy-making and yet mobilizing strikes in the field which cut agricultural production and contribute to inflationary pressures. Since financing of the INDAP unions is considerably facilitated by the agency's treasury, it also casts a heavy shadow on the organizational independence which the CD ideology extols. INDAP'S director, Jacques Chonchol, explains his agency's activities on the basis of expediency. The other organizers just weren't moving fast enough, bickering among themselves and slowed by their budgets. The need to organize the campesinos is so great and so urgent that all possible resources must be dedicated to the job. Once organized and "conscientized", the campesino groups will choose their own course.

The multifaceted operation in Chile's countryside today is plagued by conflict and contradiction as well as animated by success and optimism. But behind the reality of mixed blessings, to be described in the next newsletter, is the constant refrain of organization and participation:

"One of the essential means to achieve the structural change pursued by the Government and the Christian Democratic party is the organization of the people. Without realizing this goal, there will never exist a truly democratic society in Chile.

"If the people are not organized, there will take place that which we see in all Latin American communities. A President is elected, the people are confident that he will act in the benefit of all, but the organized social and economic groups apply pressure, and the President, isolated without the support of the people, must concede. Then there comes a new candidate and new hopes, and exactly the same happens again. It is necessary, therefore, to realize that without an organized people there can be no Government of the people."

Sincerely yours,



Frances M. Foland

Photos, pp. 1, 11: Courtesy of  
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