

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FMF-17 Chile's Agrarian Reform: The Controversy

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Richard H. Nolte, Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

With this newsletter I am going to rush in where angels fear to tread. I am going to attempt to do what I insist it is too early to do: evaluate Chile's agrarian reform in the light of the progress to date. To use a cliché, it's like guessing the size of an iceberg from its superficial protrusion seen from a distance.

To clear my conscience a bit I shall first suggest a few reasons why judgment seems premature. Two major aims have been reiterated over the years by the proponents: to integrate the campesino sector into the social, economic and political life of the nation and to increase agricultural production. The Agrarian Reform Law was passed in July 1967, and is just completing its first year; the Corporación de la Reforma Agraria (CORA, the agrarian reform agency) operated previously to that law but under restraints pointed out in FMF-14. The oldest asentamientos are those in the Valley of Choapa; CORA took the land in 1965, and just this year the asentamientos will complete their transitory period. The first year's accounting is not even completed for most of the projects. As of last month, June 1968, CORA had expropriated 645 fundos but, due to procedural and administrative prerequisites, only 260 asentamientos have been organized, incorporating some 9000 families, or approximately 70,000 people—in a national population of 9,000,000. Therefore, to praise or damn the agrarian reform at this time is to overstate the possibilities of an operation as yet embryonic and limited.

Also, I look askance at most of the statistics which are bandied about by all factions, pro and con. I have gathered them assiduously—pamphlets, polemics and full-page spreads in the newspapers; at first I read them as gospel but now tend to put them aside as interesting samples of sophistry. Like Alice in Wonderland, having come into this brouhaha of the Mad Hatter and his guests, I think it best to make my exit.

Here in Santiago now there is a big fuss about whether the asentamientos have increased production or not. The opposition proves that they have not by comparing them with the production of efficient, mechanized fundos. The advocates prove that they have by comparing them with the fundos which were expropriated because they were not exploited or badly so. Object of this exercise to prove or disprove the asentamientos' effectiveness is the urban prize. If the opposition can demonstrate that tax money is hemorrhaging into this program without bringing results, it stands to gain not only a potent ally to pressure the Government into slowing the process but also the votes of the urban

groups soured with a utopian scheme which brings neither more nor cheaper foods into their kitchens.

A poll of Santiago inhabitants, commissioned by the Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura (SNA, landowners' association), was overwhelmingly unfavorable to the agriculturalists, as described in FMF-14. But it did prove a discrepancy which the opposition could turn to its advantage: whereas the implementers of the agrarian reform are as much (and some of them more so) concerned for the social aspect, the man-on-the-street supported it for more tangible reasons:

Asked why the agrarian reform was necessary, the largest group—33.9%—said to increase agricultural production, while only 11.9% named the betterment of the campesinos.

Similarly, when asked what they understood by "agrarian reform", 28.8% said the increase of production, and only 4.6% mentioned to give land and assistance to the campesinos.

As is natural, few city dwellers have any direct contact with the agrarian reform. Visitors to the asentamientos in the surrounding Central Zone are largely foreign technicians and journalists. There has been little attempt on the part of the proponents to present their case by first-hand demonstrations.

In April a citizens' group was founded to propagate the reform's cause in the city. Called the Frente Unido de Defensa de la Reforma Agraria (FUDRA, The United Front in Defense of the Agrarian Reform), it chose a campesino as president, Don Raúl Figueroa, described in FMF-16; it aims particularly at uniting peasants, students and trade unionists in a program to explain the advantages of the agrarian reform through lectures, writings and debates. However, its activities have little range, and its composition suggests that it may be talking largely to the already converted.

Perhaps because CORA is absorbed by the day-by-day necessities of effecting the program, or perhaps because its policy-makers are motivated more by idealism than pragmatism, the agency has taken few steps to explain the agrarian reform to the public; its limited defenses against the charges of economic failure do not convey the scope of the program's goals. As example of one practical suggestion that was quickly shunted aside, it was proposed that market-bound foodstuffs from asentamientos be so packaged as to identify the source and call attention to the superior quality—a sort of "This is Your Agrarian Reform At Work" brainwash. Then, the urban housewife would have some personal contact with the program and could judge it in terms of purse and palate.

As it is, propaganda emanates largely from the press. Santiago has a clutch of magazines, tabloids and newspapers. There are five major dailies of which four are more or less critical of the agrarian reform. On the left, the Socialist and Communist sheets (La Ultima

Hora and El Siglo, respectively) favor the concept but attack the Government and CORA for their timidity in carrying out the program and for their alleged injustices to some peasants. In the middle is La Nación, the government organ, which---of course---defends on all scores. To the far right is the Diario Ilustrado which---of course---attacks on all scores. The most prestigious and influential journal is El Mercurio; it is conservative by nature but takes independent stands, sometimes favoring the Frei government's policies. However, for El Mercurio, agrarian reform as now being implemented is a bête noire, and its editorials regularly lash out at it:

"'Physicians' mistaken in their diagnosis of the agriculture insist upon administering counterproductive remedies. Combating the concentration of lands, they have created a State feudalism of 1,226, 252.8 hectares which consumes huge amounts of public resources, which has not created one single campesino proprietor and which has not been able to demonstrate that its methods of exploitation and its management of its workers even come close to the average private agriculture. A bureaucratic apparatus, more interested in gaining support through propaganda and through the mobilization of political forces than in law and economic efficiency, is frustrating the purposes of the government program.

"This reality of statism, bureaucracy and improductivity is not the agrarian reform which was hoped for by the country and the peasants themselves..."

During March, April and May, El Mercurio carried a series of analyses on its economic page, liberally illustrated with graphs and charts, to prove mismanagement of CORA, charging that the asentamientos were heavily indebted to the agency, that the income of the asentados was inferior to that of campesinos on private fundos and that profits on the agrarian reform projects were less than half of those on private farms. CORA and other agencies concerned with agrarian reform countered, taking half-page ads, equally documented to prove the opposite. The two sides waged a donnybrook which lapsed into countercharges of calumny.

As logic would suggest, there are examples of win, lose and draw in a program of this complexity. That any of the group of inquilinos---few with any previous managerial experience---could be transformed into asentados and within the first year increase production and income seems in itself a considerable achievement. In addition, the first asentamientos set up were generally on poorer lands or on badly maintained fundos which required significant improvements and inputs in soil, equipment and buildings before they could be brought to a productive level. In this first phase the asentado societies are, naturally, incurring considerable debt as they acquire farm machinery and undertake the expansion and renovation of internal roads, fences, irrigation systems, barns, bodegas, etc.; also, many asentamientos are simultaneously initiating housing programs to allow transfer, as early as possible, from fundo lodgings, often substandard.

It would not, therefore, seem advantageous to try to defend the agrarian reform at this stage on the basis of purely economic considerations. Yet, this is exactly what CORA and its cognate agencies have been forced to do. Mistaken in initiating the polemic within the economic sphere, the proponents have been thrown on the defensive, the opponents happily seizing the gauntlet and maximizing on the public attention drawn by the fray.

At the outset it would have seemed advisable to clarify that the agrarian reform is not just an economic measure and that practical gains would come but not in the first phase. But allowing itself to be restricted to but one battlepiece CORA is now committed to compete on this basis. The latest encounter has just taken place: at the request of the Senate, the Superintendency of Banks called upon CORA to produce financial records of the asentamientos, and CORA refused to do so, declaring itself unqualified to provide such data on the grounds of a legal technicality. CORA's argument is probably sound---i.e., the asentamientos are "Agricultural Societies", that is to say entities independent of State organisms; therefore, only the asentados have access to the complete records and authority to divulge them. But, right or wrong by law, the impression of the public---disinterested in technical details---is that CORA is trying to cover over disadvantageous material. The opposition wins by default, and emphasizes its interpretation:

"It has not been possible for public opinion to be informed of the balances of the collectivistic rural exploitations, referred to as asentamientos...the way to establish the debate on reliable and thorough data would be to be apprised of the balances and physical production of the properties administered by CORA. Public opinion has the right to be informed of the results of the program of agrarian reform..."

Although it is a factor extraneous to the agrarian reform and its attendant controversy, a phenomenon of nature may play its role in influencing the program's course. Right now it is winter, the season of rains, and but a few centimeters have fallen in the Central Zone. The mountains which encircle Santiago are usually snow-covered by this time, but this year they are still bare. Last year was dry, but this is a drought year---the worse suffered by Chile in a century. In the area to the north, livestock is dying of thirst and starvation, and in this the normal planting season, farmers can do nothing because the seeds would die in the parched soil. Inevitably the drought will impair the country's economy, the balance of payments and the government's budget. The situation presages cutbacks, and "social overhead" programs which, in the general public's opinion, have not yet proved their value will probably be the first to suffer.

There have already been reductions in this year's quotas to CORA and INDAP, as there were for almost all government programs in a move to reduce public expenditures contributing to inflationary pressures. But the director of neither agency admits to any concern about this

diminution. They insist that the reduction in funds implies no reduction of belief in the program. In addition, it is explained that both agencies enjoy revolving funds, as loans to farmers are repaid and, also, they look to international agencies for considerable support.

The opposition flaunts the great cost of the program in its sustained effort to arouse an outcry from the public. Government figures demonstrate that it absorbed but 1.9% of the national budget in 1967 and, by projection, 2% this year.

In any case, it is on the economic front that the agrarian reform is most vigorously besieged at this time. This is consistent with the large landholders' stand that agricultural problems can, without exception, be resolved by economic and technical measures. If the economic failure of the agrarian reform can be established, it will, by extension, prove the inaptitude of government to administer agricultural institutions and the incapacity of peasants to become entrepreneurs. The reformmongers' interest in repairing the social structure is considered at least naive, certainly economically unwise, and by some elements on the Right as disastrous. In the words of the Chilean historian, Francisco Encina:

"Parcelization means the abrupt transfer of the land from the hands of its present owners, who are the elite, into the hands of the inept. The results will be a social and economic cataclism of unforeseeable scope...(it) has a 95% chance of producing an irreparable catastrophe."

The proponents cannot accept that the peasants are inherently inept. If this is the case, the agrarian reform is ineluctably predestined to failure. For the ideologues, man not money is the vital cog which will determine the program's fate, and it has been the environment which has spanned the inquilinos' passivity and ignorance. Just as important as fertilizing the soils and repairing the fences are teaching literacy and developing leadership.

Defending the agrarian reform in the House of Deputies, a Chilean legislator related an anecdote told by René Dumont, the noted French specialist in agricultural affairs:

"A (Chilean) latifundista of French descent showed me a school built by his father on the fundo, and he told me he himself would never have done it because it develops a 'bad spirit'. A few minutes later this latifundista complained of the lack of professional knowledge among his inquilinos, without having it occur to him that this lack of knowledge was linked to a lack of education."

CORA's operation vis-à-vis the asentamientos is all-encompassing. While advising on agricultural techniques, granting credit and participating in the administrative council, it is also giving leadership training, organizing literacy classes, setting up cooperatives, supervising the construction of houses, etc. In one area with 11 asentamientos,

the CORA staff numbers 23, including social workers, agronomists, promoters, engineers, coordinators, accountants, administrators, etc. The close tutelage of CORA on all matters of the asentamiento has given rise to the oft-voiced charge that the traditional patron has merely been replaced by a bureaucratic patron.

CORA, like any institution, is no better than the people who compose it and, although its staff members undergo special training, not all are instilled with the ideals behind the reform and not all are capable of coping with its complexities. In addition, it is a crash program, bound by law to a three-year duration, or five in special cases. Therefore, undoubtedly, CORA functionaries at times adopt the paternalistic role to which the peasants so easily respond and impose their authority in order to resolve a situation rather than awaiting the slower process of democratic procedure in the asentamiento's administrative bodies.

According to the opposition, "the relations between the campesinos and CORA would be unacceptable in any labor legislation. The asentado sees his progress totally linked to the arbitrariness of the public functionary, which means that there is no social mobility. Moreover, the asentado has to make out as best he can with what he has; he cannot expand his interests, nor may he sell nor will his piece of land. He continues tied to the land forever."

Those of the Left who attack CORA on social grounds complain of explicit injustices wrought against the peasants. A case which is so far unique, but which will reoccur from time to time as other asentamientos reach maturity, is that in the Valley of Choapa where the land should soon be divided and titles granted. Now there are 1,483 families but, with parcelization 600 must go in order to establish viable economic units. The priority group is composed of heads of families; eliminated will be the young bachelors, the aged and retired, and the widows, as well as some full families.

Choapa peasants interviewed by El Siglo commented:

"Some (of those to be dispossessed) were born and raised here... the people don't want to leave the land where they have lived so many years."

"We are not in agreement with the qualifications set. There are capable people which they say are not capable. There are people born and raised here, and they want to transfer them to other asentamientos."

"We are in favor of defending the retired and the widows that they want to kick out..."

"If I died tomorrow, my wife would suddenly get 'the gentle boot'."

CORA has assured all those eliminated from the Choapa asentamientos that they will be settled elsewhere. The problem resembles that of urban



A Chilean
Campesino

renewal projects in big cities of the U.S.; the new place might be better but it cannot be as good. Furthermore, resettlement is to be on expropriated fundos which are underpopulated, but other landless groups---the *medieiros* (sharecroppers), *arrendatarios* (renters), etc.---also press for land, so again the widows and aged may find themselves in second running.

The plight of the weak is to be lamented, but it is not peculiar to Chile's agrarian reform nor does it pose a serious threat to its survival. However, the dissatisfaction which agitates independent "out-groups" is a potent force with justified complaints and a mood to be exploited by the opposition. As pointed out in FMM-16, the *inquilinos* who benefit directly from the land redistribution compose a fourth of the agricultural population, while other groups, not including the large and medium landowners, represent over half. Some of these elements---particularly the *medieiro*, *arrendatarios* and *mini-fundistas*---had high hopes that they would benefit from the reform and continue to protest that their qualifications are superior to those of the *inquilinos*.

Last month a group of small farmers held a convention at which they formed a confederation. One of the leaders, Arturo Calvo Garrido, president of the truck farmers cooperative, said:

"When the process of the agrarian reform began to develop, the small farmers (35,000 in the province of Santiago alone) were happy. The *medieiros*, *parceleros* and workers never would be able to become owners of the land and now that opportunity was offered to them. But the disillusionment is great: whoever reads the Law will realize that there is no provision which contemplates this vast sector of workers."

In the case of the "independents" the agrarian reform's sin has been that of omission rather than commission. INDAP's attentions are directed toward them, but this does not give them land. If the share-cropper or renter has simultaneously served as an *inquilino*, then he may qualify to become an *asentado*, but a number of human, psychological factors hinder this association.

To become a member of an *asentamiento* inevitably means that the independent is one among many former *inquilinos*. Since the transitory stage is intended for training, the independent must undergo a process which he considers unnecessary in his case. Not only does it seem a demotion to him as a result of the tutelage, but also he loses his independence, submitting to the judgments and instructions of the *asentado* committees. By chance or possibly because of personal animosity, he may be assigned to some of the more menial tasks, cleaning the irrigation ditches, the cattle stalls, etc.

Former wage and salary earners on the *fundo* likewise have difficulty integrating into the *asentamiento*. The *voluntarios* and *afuerinos*—that is, the day workers—often lack the qualifications to become *asentados*, and the former administrators either do not want to demote themselves or, becoming *asentados*, continue in their same roles of authority, perpetuating the paternalistic relationship.

Only one article of the Law deals with the problem of dwarf units:

"Article 11. Rural properties which constitute *minifundias* are liable to expropriation for the sole effect of regrouping them and assigning in any one of the manners indicated in Article 67. The ex-proprietors who demonstrate the greatest capacity for agricultural work will have priority as assignees."

Jacques Chonchol, director of INDAP, sees the *minifundia* problem as one of the most difficult to overcome. There are areas, such as Chiloé and the "Little North" (provinces of Atacama, Coquimbo and Aconcagua) which are a welter of sub-economic landholdings; the owners resort to seasonal migration, south to Magallanes or north to the mining areas, in order to supplement their agricultural earnings. Chonchol suggests that the way to cope with this unfavorable man/land ratio is to develop light industries linked to agriculture—food processing, slaughterhouses, etc.—in order to siphon off some of the rural population. However, as yet there is no concerted government program with this solution in mind.

The Government is contemplating at least two measures to meet some

of the demands of the independents. First would be adoption of a deliberate policy to expropriate underpopulated fundos so that inquilinos would be a minor consideration in the redistribution of land. Then, the nature of the asentamiento would be changed, shortening the period to perhaps one year and limiting CORA's assistance to credit and the organization of a cooperative.

Though such a plan might bring some results and would at least demonstrate the Government's concern for the independents, it hardly seems the solution for the bulk of the independent agricultural population. It is doubtful if many of these underpopulated fundos would be located in the desirable Central Zone. Resettlement in more isolated areas is not likely to be popular, particularly among those small farmers clustered around Santiago who make their living by intensive cultivation aimed at the nearby city market. In addition, the Government must consider the higher costs of this type of expropriation where fundos would be lacking the facilities of housing and infrastructure necessary to support an increased number of residents. And, certainly, any move to "regroup" the minifundias, as sanctioned by the law, would foment loud protests.

So, the agrarian reform continues plagued by this paradox that it cannot satisfy a large portion of deserving peasants. In turn this group becomes a potent force of agitators, providing headlines and demonstrations for the ill-wishers.

The opposition is, in fact, perfecting its techniques of mobilization in order to block, delay and embarrass the agrarian reform. Incidents which cast doubt upon the program receive ample publicity due to the orientation of the press. The pilot project for the resistance was the case of the fundo Santa Marta de Longotoma which peaked in April violence. This was the first such outbreak in the course of the program and was seized upon by the adversaries for purposes of diverse exploitation. Nuances of the imbroglio are so numerous, subtle and unverifiable as to defy analysis, but its example has since served for similar test cases.

Santa Marta was a fundo of 65,000 acres near La Ligua in the province of Aconcagua north of Santiago. Its sole owner until mid-1965 was a septuagenarian widow; in August of that year CORA expropriated the property in accordance with Article 15 of Law No. 15,020:..."expropriation is authorized of...abandoned properties, as well as those which are notoriously badly exploited and below the possible levels of production in relation to the economic conditions dominating in the region..."

But this being the previous agrarian reform law (as discussed in FMM-14), its owner could contest the expropriation while maintaining control of the property. Thus, matters stagnated through two years of litigation during which time the owner "sold" two sections to a relative and a friend; since this action was subsequent to the retroactive date of 4 November 1964 set by the second law, No. 16,640, the

division was later declared null and void.

It had been at the initiative of Santa Marta's inquilinos that expropriation was first requested; one among several letters directed to government officials, this one of 3 November 1966, said:

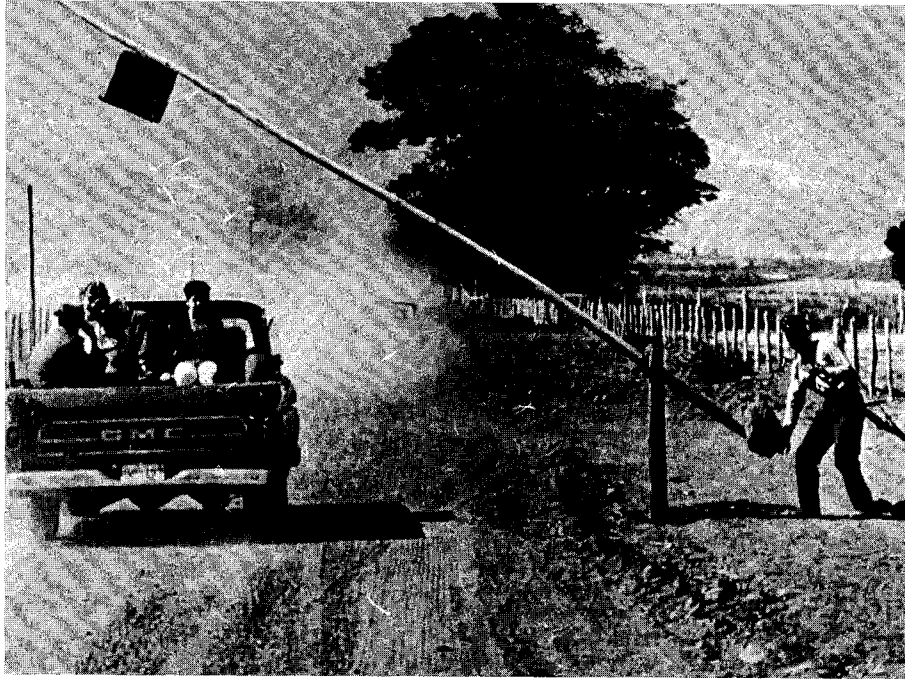
"It is now more than three years that there have been conflicts between the campesinos and Sra. Marta (the owner) because of failure to fulfill the labor laws and because of the conduct of certain of her representatives on the hacienda. Furthermore, it should be added that the hacienda has always been badly administered and because of this, badly worked..."

In April 1967, knowing that the expropriation was imminent either as legalized under the old law or by the new one to be promulgated in July 1967, CORA began preparing the campesinos, convening meetings on public property on or adjacent to the fundo---roads, headquarters of law-enforcement contingents, etc. About this time, the owners also adopted more aggressive tactics, wooing the campesinos to their side by sharecropping concessions and granting titles to houses and adjacent plots previously held only in usufruct. There had been a group of medieiros working the fundo lands before the expropriation squabble, but now their number was greatly increased by former inquilinos benefitted by the "new policy" of the owners.

By the time CORA moved to take physical possession of the fundo, February 1968, the resident campesinos were effectively polarized: a part strongly supported CORA and an asentamiento, another part had vested interests to protect and so opposed the expropriation. The numbers game was played to the hilt, the total of the supporters claimed by the two sides always adding to more campesinos than the 207 who lived on the fundo. But that those opposing CORA's supervision numbered more than 100 campesinos (claim: 197) plus families, there is no doubt and, when the public force (Carabineros) moved to occupy the fundo, they found this coterie literally entrenched around the patronal house where they hold out even until today. It was a clash between this group and the Carabineros which resulted in 11 injuries and 23 arrests in April.

The various political parties were not about to miss the fray. The Communists and Socialists moved in, compromising CORA's position by fomenting civil disobedience and castigating the agency for its timid and dilatory action. The conservative National Party took sides with those barricaded in their redoubt which came to be called the "Alcazar". Senator Pedro Ibañez, a Nationalist leader, flayed CORA for imposing its will against that of the campesinos. Though the suggestion has not been proved, it is believed that the National Party has contributed materially to support the anti-CORA forces.

CORA, meanwhile, continued its course, intending to operate within the law in the establishment of an asentamiento. Unfortunately, in the initial stages of expropriation it failed to comply with certain procedural steps prescribed by the law which caused the Supreme Court



Santa Marta de Longotoma under the control of the Carabineros



to rule against it in May. The proponents were hard put to clarify to the public that the ruling was not against the expropriation per se but concerned only insignificant infractions. CORA repaired its oversights, and on 15 May 1968 the asentamiento was officially installed.

Except for its inadvertencies CORA acted within the law throughout the affair. The self-imposition of civil obedience has been one of the hallmarks of the Frei administration, and it argues that the opposition is inspired by a "singular juridical doctrine" when it refutes the execution of a law which was passed by a significant majority in the national congress. CORA insists that upon the issuance of the expropriation decree the fundo became public property and, therefore, those blocking the establishment of the asentamiento were the transgressors; the change in the views of the campesinos was brought about not by permanent improvements in their situation but by short-term gains which would possibly be rescinded if CORA were forced to retreat. Too, the Government surely had in mind that to lose this battle would be to face up to many more using the same strategy—the "domino theory" applied to agrarian reform. That the fundo was badly exploited perhaps only the owner and her entourage would dispute, that it was divided after a date set prohibiting such a maneuver (albeit retroactive) there is no doubt, that the whole or majority of inquilinos originally favored expropriation is well-documented, that the owners altered their relationship with the inquilinos can reasonably be accredited to the threat of expropriation and not to a new-found good will.

But the *mélée* does pose a gamut of questions. Since the prime purposes stated for the agrarian reform are to distribute the land so as to 1) create more productive units, and 2) give standing to the campesinos, should the Government insist upon imposing a predetermined routine in opposition to an endemic solution promising to serve the same ends? Since CORA's budget and staff are already overextended, should not more encouragement be given to private initiative in creating viable agricultural units operating within the normal commercial channels of credit, marketing, etc.? Should not more imagination and flexibility be exercised in applying the institution of the asentamiento, taking more care to determine the capabilities and wishes of the future asentados in order to adjust the system to the local situation? Should CORA, though within the law, act against the will of the majority? But, to what extent could CORA condition its procedure given its internal limitations and its external enemies?

The consideration of Chile's agrarian reform returns to the realization that the surgery is not being carried out in an antiseptic operating room but amid the jostlings of a political toss and tumble. Though some complain that the ideologues prevail in the government agencies, evolution has definitely been toward an increasing political orientation. Spokesmen for the Government zestfully apply the adjective "política" to the objectives but with a generic connotation referring to the politization, i.e. secularization, of the peasantry. In contrast, observers lament the growing role of partisan politics. It not only plays an important role in the syndical field, as mentioned in FMF-16, but also

becomes an issue in the election of asentamiento committees.

As example, the fundo of Santa Inez was expropriated in 1964 and when CORA took it over, the union of the FCI (Marxist) was firmly established. CORA hoped to counterbalance this force by winning control of the Administrative Council but, instead, it gained only three seats against six for sympathizers of FRAP (the far left coalition). At the installation of the asentamiento of Santa Marta de Longotoma the new asentados were deluged with the demagoguery of all the major parties, each expanding upon its own services and promises to the campesinos while downgrading those of the rival parties. Considerable disillusionment is spreading through the operation because "it is no longer clean"; however—realistically and unfortunately—an agrarian reform program is too fertile a field for exploitation to exist in an apolitical state.

A practical aspect in considering political potential of the rural area is the restriction of the vote to the literate. Chile's literacy rate is among the highest in Latin America, said to be around 90% by this time. But almost all those disenfranchized for this reason are campesinos, and it was part of Frei's package of constitutional reforms to delete the literacy requirement. Article 10 (10) (establishing the expropriation rights of the Government) is the only part of that package which was separated from the whole and pushed through Congress. Enthusiastic libertarians, even within the Government, lament the failure of the Frei administration to push this measure. Although an amendment has been proposed by Christian Democratic legislators, all action has apparently been postponed until after 1970.

Even the Right has conjured up ways of appealing to the campesinos. Their prime slogan is "we will give you titles to the land", implying that the present government (or a successor further to the left) intends to perpetuate the current communal ownership and secure a system of State collectivism.

Chief spokesman for the Right, Senator Pedro Ibáñez, claims that the agrarian reform has strengthened his cause in the countryside:

"I, as Senator of the National Party, have no reason to complain, because the adhesion of the peasantry to the N.P. in this moment is something really impressive and moving. The campesinos see in us the only bulwark which can free them from the oppression to which they are submitted by the agrarian reform..."

Ironically, one of the sources of the "collectivization scare" is Mensaje, publication of the Jesuit community who have contributed to the Christian Democratic development; in that publication's review of Chile: Tenure of the Land and Socio-Economic Development by the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development (August 1966) the evaluation closes by suggesting that "there is a certain ambiguity...they have not been able—or not wanted—to avoid recommending implicitly that the solution of...the problem resides in a substantial collecti-

vization of agriculture. It must be emphasized that this is not suggested explicitly in the text, but that it can be noted in certain premises..."

The right-wing weekly, PEC, likes to refer to the asentamientos as kolkhoz in order better to conjure up the image of "sovietization". Under headlines such as "Those who do not submit to the agrarian collectivization", El Mercurio carries articles that describe the asentados as "subjects of CORA and INDAP and of the bureaucratic instruments which operate in order to assure that the campesino depends upon the State."

The ogre is not completely figment of the rightist imagination. The Agrarian Reform Law invests the State with great powers and yet leaves certain matters sufficiently ambiguous as to allow any of a number of interpretations; a government with authoritarian aims could make it a useful instrument in both banishing private property and establishing State farms.

A major contribution to the collectivist charge is the fact that absolutely no titles have been given out to asentados as yet. However, even Rightists—those of more moderate and reasonable views—concede that the present government has no collectivist ambitions. That no titles have as yet been awarded is perfectly explicable since only now are the first asentamientos completing their three years. Unfortunately, this first group, in Choapa, is not ready to cut its ties with CORA since infrastructural work is not completed, and there are the unresolved problems of resettlement described earlier in this newsletter. It will be psychologically poor if the Government, even at the bidding of the campesinos, must prolong the transitory period of these first asentamientos eligible for investiture. The gleeful howls of the adversaries will echo from the cordillera.

But one thing seems certain: one way or the other this Government will give out as many titles as possible in the next two years. On the one hand, such is its intent because of conviction and objective; on the other, to fail to do so would be politically disastrous, alienating urban middle class and rural voters and handing a potent campaign issue to the rivals. Because of practical considerations, many titles will probably not be on an individual basis but, as the law stipulates, "in exclusive ownership to campesino cooperatives or to agrarian reform cooperatives, or in joint ownership to campesinos or to campesino cooperatives or to agrarian reform cooperatives"; these communal arrangements would be for "land exclusively adequate for forestation, grazing, fruit orchards, vineyards or other types of land which due to their natural conditions are not susceptible to division without a deterioration of the soils or of its economic management possibilities." Since these conditions may prevail in many cases, cooperative rather than individual ownership may prove common and, so, give cause for a continuing charge of "collectivization".

President Frei speaks unequivocally to dispel the fear that the

Government will not establish private ownership. In his State of the Nation message, 22 May 1968, he emphasized:

"...the central object of the agrarian reform is not to maintain the campesinos on asentamientos, as many maliciously have affirmed, but to establish individual ownership except in those cases where division is not advisable—the asentamiento is a transitory phase destined to arrive at a system of private, individual property..."

So, the agrarian reform in Chile goes its way, beleaguered on all sides by old and new criticisms. The Right has tried to obviate the whole process: first, there is no reason for it, secondly it is mistaken in its direction, then it attacks a sacrosanct right of property, it entrusts the land to an inherently inferior group, it will result in a catastrophic fall in production, it will lead to collectivization, the asentamiento system is an economic fiasco, etc. According to the conservative opposition, the threat posed by the reform is of gargantuan magnitude. A mini-reform, says the Left—too little budget, too limited expropriations, too timid bureaucrats, too modest goals, too slow moving, too bourgeois in its conceptualization, etc.

Somewhere in between the Government tries to execute a program which: operates within the laws of the country, realizes economic goals but also brings about structural change, and serves its own political ends. The law was passed by a respectable majority of the Congress; therefore, they reason that it rightfully may be enforced and should be so accepted by the society. Neither this Government has—nor will any other have—the definitive answers to all the problems; speaking to a peasant group, Rafael Moreno, director of CORA, observed:

"...it is essential to launch, now, an agrarian reform with all the risks and all the consequences that may result from it. An agrarian reform can never be organized in such a way that the first step is followed by the second in the manner foretold by the theoreticians. An agrarian reform is a live being in which the "subject" is the campesino...it must be carried out, with or without technicians, be the campesinos prepared or not, financial resources available or not, because great will be the risk of realizing an agrarian reform but much greater are the risks that are run if the land is not immediately distributed...the process never is easy, from the point of view of human relations, from the point of economic organization of the people who are affected and from the point of view of the campesinos that acquire the ownership of the land. Agrarian reform is easy for no one..."

Just as the present state of Chile's agrarian reform cannot be satisfactorily analysed, so its future cannot be predicted. It has many ways to go as well as up, and its radiants are as those of a whirligig, blown by both internal and external forces: if copper prices drop and so reduce the country's income and the government budget...; if the drought persists and brings on an agricultural

crisis...; if inflationary pressures increase and cause a reduction in public expenditures...; if the urban populace decides it is burdened by a useless program...; if the idealists and the doers of the reform agencies lose their élan and filter off...; if the momentum gets out of hand and leads to violence...; if a change of government leads to radical changes in policy or personnel...

Some international savants on the subject predict the program will peter out of its own accord in the next very few years. Others watching it closely already note a slowing as budgetary pressures mount and elections approach.

At least the reform seems assured of a political future; it is generally presumed that in the coming key elections either the Christian Democrats will continue in control, or the government will move left. In the second case, the tenor of the program might change, but it would survive.

Jacques Chonchol of INDAP believes that, regardless of the possible vicissitudes, the peasant sector has already been sufficiently mobilized and organized to fend for itself. If indeed this is true, and this newly-created sectorial energy can be peacefully channeled into the social, political and economic workings of the Chilean society, the achievement would be of historical dimensions.

I should like to think the solution might be brought about by a program of such short duration— for Chile itself, and also for the promise it would hold for all Latin America and other areas of the world where vast segments of the rural society continue largely outside the process of modernization. However, it is my opinion that its impact has not yet been sufficient to consider it at the "take-off" stage, and the relative poverty of Chile as a nation makes the program's survival more precarious than its counterparts in more affluent Venezuela and Mexico. But it has advantages in the strength of the law and the dedication of its leading implementers and, if it is granted a decade or more, it should realize its ambitious economic, political and social goals.

Sincerely yours,



Frances M. Foland

Photos courtesy of El Mercurio

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